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NOTE.—The story, *The Warehouse*, by Mary Harris and George Woodcock's article on *The Decline of H. G. Wells*, announced for this issue, are held over for lack of space, but will appear in NOW No. 8. All manuscripts will be read and considered, but no responsibility can be accepted for their safety, and they will only be returned if accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope.

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Editorial

The Miller Case

To-day we are faced by new and serious attacks on the freedom of the artist. In Russia, a whole series of repressive acts against writers and other artists has taken place, literary magazines have been suppressed, editors dismissed, and writers respected throughout the world, like Boris Pasternak and Zostchenko, have been publicly condemned because they could not bring themselves to write exactly to the party line. In France, a moralistic union of Right and Left has chosen as its first victim among writers one of *NOW*'s most frequent contributors, Henry Miller. In Australia books like *Le Chant de Maldoror* are being banned. In England and America the process of stifling art is not yet taking the form of actual banning—perhaps because in these countries publishers are sufficiently timid; instead, there is a steady process of absorbing writers and artists into semi-official institutions like the B.B.C. or British Council, where they are expected to produce work to order, and usually cease very soon to do anything of real creative value.

This campaign against the writer, whether it takes the open form of banning and denunciation or the disguised form of putting him into a zoo, is symptomatic of very sinister tendencies in world society. In almost every country, no less in Labour England than in Communist Russia, there is a steady increase in totalitarian method, and, what is worse, totalitarian thought. Political groups of both Right and Left have this tendency in common. And it is because free writing and art are essentially individual that such groups will act against them. Whatever moral reasons may be given for such actions, the real reason is that a writer who is allowed to say what he thinks, an artist who is allowed to show what he perceives, may prove a very disruptive fragment in a total state.

The case of Miller is typical. His four earlier books have been banned for years in England and America, but could be published in Paris, as long as they were in the English language. Since the war, however, they have been translated into French, and it is their sudden great popularity in Paris that has made the moralists decide to act against them. Of course, the authorities in England, America and France all base their cases on moral grounds. But their contentions are invalidated, by the simple fact that any amount of sly pornography or brutally sadistic literature can be published freely in all these countries, without important interference. The real grudge they have against Miller is that he is a dynamic social critic, and that he uses

his obscenity as a means of jerking people into consciousness of the corruption in the world where they live. Miller is being persecuted, not because his books are obscene, but because they are subversive. And, since all free art is subversive, the persecution of artists will not stop at cases where some plausible excuse can be produced. It will advance rapidly to the extremity already represented by Russia, where non-adherence to the party line is a sufficient reason for condemnation.

In the West we can at present do little about the situation within Russia. But French, English and American writers *can* still make their voices heard in a case like that of Miller. And they should protest as loudly as they can, for if this kind of persecution continues no free writer, and ultimately no free man, will be untouched.

But we have at least one encouraging lesson to learn. Nothing emerges so clearly from all these persecutions as the fact that the totalitarian parties recognise and dread the power of the writer. If one day the writers themselves discover it, an incalculable impetus may be given to the struggle for human freedom.

Alex Comfort

Literary Sadism and the Origins of Miss Blandish

The increase of sadistic imagery and of violence in modern literature is a tendency which hardly anyone who reads extensively can have failed to notice, unless it is that the whole apparatus of writing has become so widely invaded by toughness of every kind that the social trends behind it have lost some of their sharpness. The reading public in an age of exceptional public violence has become acclimatised to violent books, but sadism and violence are by no means the same thing, and it is with the second that I am concerned. When Bloch, some twenty years ago, characterised the association between brutality and sex as a typically English phenomenon he was undoubtedly prejudiced, but there is sufficient truth in the charge to make it of interest to the student of literature. More striking still was the remark by Fraxi that during the nineteenth century, at a period which closely coincided with the Industrial Revolution, erotic literature in England underwent a change away from the healthily bawdy towards the brutal—"It is obvious that modern authors have allowed themselves to be influenced by de Sade, and have imitated the cynicism, cruelty and lasciviousness . . . which, it must be admitted, he handled with masterly skill. That is why the character of English erotic fiction has under-

gone a radical change, resulting in the complete loss of its healthy tone." One reason for the change, that overtly pornographic literature ceased to be tolerated, and only subjects whose relation to sex was not recognised by Queen Victoria could get through, seems to have escaped Fraxi's notice, but there are other causes for the extreme cult of toughness which has invaded even belletristic and "serious" writing.

Violence *per se*, political, social and personal, is not a sexual so much as a social phenomenon, characteristic of big-city communities with their centralised power, their militarism, their proletariat, and their civic irresponsibility and frustration. But it is far less the appreciation and acceptance of violence than the worship of cruelty which is so noticeable at the moment. Sadism is not primarily a social phenomenon, but an exaggeration of a normal component of instinctive mating behaviour, and like much other instinctive behaviour it has three prominent characters: 1. it is present potentially in almost all individuals; 2. it is extremely readily acquired by public sanction; 3. it evokes a reaction from the conscious level which makes it more formidable as an unconscious force than as a source of overtly brutal conduct. It differs from most other abnormal sources of pleasure in being infinitely more destructive socially, whether it is conscious, as it was at Dachau, or unconscious, as it was in the Victorian public school, or is, in spite of reformist ideals, in the modern prison system, and it is readily infectious through practice, public example and literary acceptance. It is with the last of these that I am chiefly concerned here, and while it has to be admitted that the existence of a society based, as all forms of barbarism are based, on power and on unlimited public violence, makes the acceptance of cruelty rather easier, in the literary field epidemic sadism is as striking among the opponents of barbarism as among its advocates. There is on the whole more sadistic material in Faulkner, Hemmingway, and even thorough-going recalcitrants like Miller or Patchen, than in all the pronouncements of the power-bosses. I do not think that this is an adverse comment on their work, but it is important to realise its origins.

The reactions of a normal individual to the discovery of his own animal appetites are very diverse—if his desire for brutality is overt he can become a bully or a Fascist spiv—if it is not, his reaction is far more tortuous. He will tend either to rationalise his desires in the interests of discipline, justice, order and so forth, and thereby make them respectable enough to be admitted to consciousness, or he will over-react to them and become a reformist, a pacifist, an opponent of brutality. This last phenomenon explains the savagery of much of Patchen's imagery and the extreme idealism which goes with it—it is undoubtedly one of the most satisfactory means of disposing of an antisocial impulse, but the process ought to be at least partly conscious, as in his case it is. It is the unconsciously rationalised form which is so destructive: one can make a bully ashamed of himself, but not a disciplinarian. A rather morbid sensitivity to physical violence can produce an anthropoid thug who enjoys being such, or it can produce *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which belongs, psychologically, to the literature of over-reaction: between the two is the other product, the martinet,

the exterminator of Huns, the idealistic bully—it is he who is the most intractable and incorrigible figure of megalopolitanism.

Accordingly, apart from the few writers upon whom epidemic sadism has had little effect, one can trace all stages of its impact upon personalities in the literary field. There are the conscious bullies—Montherlant, the tougher-yet detective writers: unconscious bullies, the power-and-order school, the writers of books against Huns and letters to the press urging bigger and better floggings, all the exponents of realism against sentimentalism; dilettanti, like Masson and the *View* circus; artists whom the war has enabled to make serious and responsible material out of the contemplation of brutality—Goya, Szobel, Fautrier; professional technicians in atrocity propaganda like Ehrenberg and the English war-pamphleteers: and those who use brutality to expose brutality, like Patchen and Faulkner. Beside them, we find the group in whom the process of resolving the conflict is incomplete, where sexual athleticism, cruelty, responsibility, and over-reaction are mixed in varying proportions.

Now while abnormalities of human mating-behaviour are very numerous, the only one of long-term social importance is the sado-masochistic reaction pattern, because it manifests itself openly in aggression towards other, and innocent, people, and because in a partially rationalised form it affects the public activity of its practicers. No legislator was ever materially affected in his public acts by being a homosexual or an exhibitionist, except possibly towards a more rational view of these abnormalities, but all the most odious legislators—one is tempted to omit the qualification, in view of the close association of sadism with the desire to govern—have been expressing abnormal impulses towards cruelty in a rationalised form. It is this fact, and the contagiousness of sadism compared with other sexual behaviour-disorders, coupled with the way in which it tends to become involved with the whole mechanism of self-satisfied egotism which exists in many psychopaths, which makes its social importance so great. It goes more closely with hypocrisy—a state which has little psychological reality, since, with regard to our unconscious impulses, we are all demonstrable hypocrites—than other abnormal patterns. It is frequently and possibly casually linked with the obsessional traits which make up a large part of the psychology of religious ritual, and it can be evoked in most normal persons by education, example, or a conspiracy of social circumstances whose common feature is ashamedness towards normal erotic activities and physical or psychical impotence. And although Freud and his successors have thrown much light on its mechanism and its mode of action on the personality, we have as yet very little idea of social prophylaxis, or even of the physical basis upon which the impulse to cruelty rests. Post-industrial megalopolitanism has been largely based on cruelty and hypocrisy, and Bloch's bizarre racialism, which tried to represent these as "Anglo-Saxon" vices inherited by the English has been superseded by the more bizarre racialism which depicts them as basically German, but we are no nearer to a comprehension of their full rôle in our own and our society's existence.

Compared with the legislative sadists, the upholders of law and retribution, by whom our whole conception of penology has been moulded and vitiated, artists come off with far less discredit. A high proportion of them are aware of their own impulses: many use them as a source of responsibility, and even of strength, much as the presence of the English or the Germans revived Irish and French literature by providing a tangible enemy, and those who succumb to them usually confined their sadism to day-dreaming, using their work as less literate dyserotics use the walls of public lavatories. Their main contribution to the growth of cruelty has been that they have rendered it artistically respectable and have put ideas into people's heads. I see no way to avoid this charge. Writers to-day have to write about the world as it is and people as they are. They run the risk of aggravating their abnormalities by discussing them, unless they possess great power of exposition and an unshakeable integrity in the perpetual drumming-in of the ethic of responsibility.

All these factors, the physiological response to violence, which is as observable as the watering of a man's mouth when he smells food, the substratum of social and sexual frustration, the natural idealisation of the criminal who is in revolt against society which allows the irresponsibles to forget his viciousness, have gone into the ancestry of Miss Blandish, of Hitler, of the War for Democracy.

However much of literary toughness is a part of this phenomenon of over-reaction, the dangers of the process were particularly striking in wartime atrocity propaganda, a form of mental aberration which seems to be historically new. There is nothing new in blackguarding your enemies, but that is not the technique of the M.O.I. atrocity. The only thing which the material considered atrocious has in common is its sexual character. The method of administration is to select or invent an action with sadistic repercussions and retail it with a denunciatory comment. The first reaction of the audience is not disapproval, but prurient stimulation—one rape is an atrocity, two million deaths in the Indian famines were not, and were played up in Germany by a wholly different technique. The subsequent reaction of the audience is steered by the quantum of denunciation in the news-item, designed to assist those whose super-ego might be unequal to the disapproval which is required. The public catches itself in the act of being stimulated and over-reacts violently against the perpetrators of the alleged action. This being safely over, they can proceed to enjoy the erogenic idea without qualms of conscience. The pornography of war is important because, being deliberately produced to assist the state-holders, it is tolerated when other forms are not. But its effect in increasing the desire of the public for further matter of the same kind is as marked as that of work which openly approves of brutality.

These factors, the human cruelty common to all ages and societies, the subsidised sadism used as a means of government, and the increasing violence of events, are the causes which underlie the "tough" novel. Besides these, megalopolitanism begets sexual gaucherie, long separations, impotence and subacute anxiety, and sadism is notorious

as a refuge for the impotent and physically frustrated.

The advent of literary sadism coincided temporally with the advent of the industrial age. The most striking, because perhaps the earliest, apparition of sadism in polite literature was in the work of Dickens. He has become so much a part of the literary landscape of this country that we tend to leave him outside analysis as well as to underestimate his importance. It was not till Edmund Wilson, an American and a member of a nation which Dickens seems to have misunderstood and disliked, that a serious evaluation of his work and its origins was attempted. The Christmas-pudding joviality and the zeal for reform cannot disguise the fundamentally morbid nature of his fascination with physical violence—*Nicholas Nickleby* is in part the novel of a flagello-maniac; that Squeers deserved what he got is more a rationalisation of Dickens' interest in his doings and his final beating-up than a cause of his creation. The other forms of sadism are paraded with the same clinical accuracy which has been observed in Dickens' neurological case-histories—they are in part observed, but also unquestionably in part experienced. Squeers is the schoolmaster-flagellant, and the hangman-virtuoso of Barnaby Rudge, the inflated Dombey persecuting his daughter, Sykes and his sex-murder, Miss Murdstone and her small chain-mail reticule, Quilp, Fagin and a host of others are portraits of the forms which sadism may take, drawn with the clinical accuracy of Krafft-Ebing. It is the study in the methods by which a novelist of integrity deals with his own abnormal impulses that Dickens turns his desire for violence against the men who at least merit exposure—his mobs burn down prisons, his heroes only beat bullies. But the dangers of such an attempt to make constructive capital from pathology are there also. Some part of the almost maudlin sentimentalism of the reformist passages is due to self-accusation.

I am not attempting to suggest that sadistic patterns were not current in fiction prior to Dickens, but they were certainly far less current in polite fiction, unless one regards the school of ghoulishness and Gothicism as one such manifestation. But Fraxi's statement that in the main eroticism prior to the industrial revolution was conscious and concerned with normal physical pleasures, and after that event became less conscious, more abnormal, and more wedded to brutality, is undeniably true. To the sensualist such as Rochester, who exhausted almost every conceivable perversity, sadistic rituals (of a fairly harmless kind) were a pepper to improve a basically normal appetite—to the subsequent erotic writers they have tended more and more to become a staple diet, rather as alcohol, an equally physiologically-conditioned and equally acquired taste, is an occasional accessory to the gourmet, but an article of diet to the drunkard. The most important single cause of this change was the physical limitation of normal sexual enjoyment imposed by poverty, lack of privacy, and desocialisation upon the poor, and by a terroristic religious outlook combined with a thoroughly septic prudery among the middle classes. The social products of urbanisation were twofold—impotence, and a diversion of normal sexuality into sadistic channels, and we are inheritors in

part of the consequences. Such an age produces authoritarians and sentimentalists, fanatical punishers and fanatical reformers in almost equal numbers, among those who rationalise or react from their recognition of a desire for cruelty, and the early neotechnic period certainly produced both.

Pulp literature is the most notable section of the public unconscious which we have at our disposal. If belletristic work resembles the purgation of the emotions by intelligent analysis, the pulp novel and the time magazine are not far removed in function from the lavatory-wall inscription, but they have the great disadvantage that they propagate ideals, and if these ideals include the glorification of bullying, then bullying will become a part of the group ideal—it can almost be transferred, aided by violent events and war, from the depressed to the admired, and non-toughness becomes a source of shame. I think Gollancz might have recognised this in his denunciation of the growth of callousness. As a simple test of the rôle of such writing in the spread of abnormal impulses and in the satisfaction of the demand which it in part creates, it is worth looking at a dozen cover-illustrations from such publications. At least three quarters of these will be found in general to have a quite undisguisedly sadistic content. The preoccupation with shootings and floggings is not a concentration upon violence so much as a concentration on one kind of violence, the kind which we know to be intimately tied up with prurency.

However, it is only fair to say that a great deal of the apparatus of these books is repeated by, and possibly derived from, more serious work. The activities of the amateur psychologists in surrealism come closest to justifying Fraxi's attack on de Sade, and it is difficult to uphold much of this work as social criticism. It is important for writers to realise how deeply they are influenced by the moral and psychological climate of their age, and the surrealists tended to reflect the very pattern they were attempting to satirise. But the sexiness of surrealism is so conscious and so laboured, much of it being studiously got up from textbooks of analysis, that it is less important, to my mind, as a formative influence on literature than the almost helpless acceptance of the sexual bully in the serious novel. I wish to make it quite clear that I am not attacking writers who share the appetites and tendencies of their age, but only attempting to analyse the origins of their artistic material—I think that the parallelism between the Hemingway hero, who consists chiefly of appetites and *cojones*, and the truncheon-swinging hero of the boys' papers, already pointed out by Orwell, is definite and instructive. It does not indicate something wrong with Hemingway, but something wrong with the social-psychical pattern. The truth seems to be that while sadism is latent in all societies, as it is in individuals, its invasion of literature and public life marks the termination of a society—we have seen two such booms in cruelty—one prior to the collapse of Rome, and one, much reinforced by monasticism and the Christian conception of sin, towards the end of the period of mediæval ecclesiocracy. The evocative force is twofold—the assertion of power, and the canalisation of brutality to support it, which pretorianism, fascism and the mediæval

papacy shared; and the personal frustration which power produces, making the sadistic pattern of conduct articulate in a desire to smash things, including oneself. I do not think I share the view of some Adlerians who regard the power-impulse as very nearly coterminous with sadism, or rather sadism as a manifestation of the impulse to power, since it seems to me in its selectivity—only some kinds of brutality are acceptable—and its ubiquity to be a physiologically conditioned process, in the grossest sense—a tail-end of instinctive mating-behaviour which can be activated by other incentives to violence originating at a rather higher level—but the connection of power with brutality and the fear of death is too close to be a psychical accident. Village communities go in for cockfighting and occasionally cruder acts of violence, but only urban societies on the point of collapse demand circuses upon the same level of necessity as they demand bread. And the literary toughness is in itself a similar revolt against impotence, a similar demand for circuses, based upon the flatness which writers find in comparing non-tough themes with the world they live in and must interpret. One has to regard this process from the viewpoint of biology, not ethics or literary criticism, since they are internal, physical forces which are at work in the determination of the kind of imagery and material which the artist finds himself selecting.

It is a point of some literary importance that sadistic writing is almost always "powerful"—that it produces an obscure reflex effect on the reader which is almost an abortive orgasm, just as salivation at the smell of food is an abortive digestion. Its effect is enhanced by a certain ritualistic pattern—those who indulge in cruel practices for sexual satisfaction generally demand a highly artificial and rigid ritual, often very odd to the observer; hunting for sport is stylised by garments, set routines, and customs in a very comparable manner: legal punishment follows another of these patterns, as anyone who realises the loving care expended in the book of instruction to hangmen and the specifications for corporal punishment in prisons and some other institutions can vouch. In literature this stylisation is equally a component of what critics describe as "powerful" writing. It is one of the fascinations of literary criticism to notice how true to type psychological patterns such as these run in the most various individuals. Accordingly the cult of stylised violence is in part due to the fact that once experienced, this psychical bowel-rumbling which "powerful" writing produces becomes an addiction among readers, and the writer who eschews pathological toughness on grounds of public health finds it hard to compete economically, and in his own esteem, with the less "sentimental" group of writers.

All these factors, the physiological response to violence, which is as observable as the watering of a man's mouth when he smells food, the substratum of social and sexual frustration, the natural idealisation of the criminal who is in revolt against society which allows the irresponsibles to forget his viciousness, and the deliberate use of this brutality-reflex by the war-owners in their struggle for power, are the direct antecedents of Miss Blandish in fact and in fiction, coupled with the unwilling example of serious writers.

I do not regard Miss Blandish as a radical or important ally of fascism and tyranny, so much as an early phase in the social process which destroys individual Fascists and tyrants. It may not be true that individual sadists habitually kill themselves, but it is unquestionably true that the employment of brutality as a foundation for a society, whether it is conscious or not, is closely comparable to the use of dynamite as a foundation for a building. The concentration of any society upon cruelty and sterility rather than upon responsibility and healthy sexual and personal expression is an invariable precursor of explosion. I regard Miss Blandish as a symptom of this process because there the brutality which the present order of barbarism has already come to idealise unconsciously and accept consciously is displayed by the rebels, the gangsters, the masterless men. It is almost a medal of public approval. I believe that in the literature of the next generation we may see the transformation of this figure from a sub-adult and sterile into an adult form, responsible instead of vicious—the mentally immature will make him into an effigy of the club-swinging political spiv, and worship that, but the surprisingly large body of human beings who are still human, and who retain at heart the normality of their appetites together with the common heritage of potential abnormality and savagery which we all share will transfer their allegiance from the gangster who enjoys brutality to the deserter, the refuser of obedience, who is struggling against and rejecting it in favour of humanity.

It is not reasonable to suppose that a free society would act like a psychical hormone and modify instinctive patterns of behaviour, but it would remove the source of aggravation which exists in centralised power, the frustration of those who are deprived of their normal civic activities, and the possibility of making the gratification of brutality respectable by calling it discipline. By its attitude to the whole conception of punishment, Anarchist thought in the present century is likely to prepare the removal of at least one of the chief refuges of respectable cruelty. Power societies are divided into two groups of persons—those who commit brutal acts, and those who punish them brutally for doing so. It is Gilbertian at times, when one hears an eminent Justice rewarding some singularly brutal act of personal violence by flogging, incarceration, or judicial strangling, in happy ignorance of the nature of his own righteous desire for order, and of the ambivalent attitude of cruel persons towards cruelty. The effect of reform has been largely to divert the weight of retributive ideas of punishment on to the heads of political rather than social offenders, so that now one can get a more savage sentence for resisting conscription than for an aggravated rape in almost all the civilised countries, an outcome which penal reformers can hardly have anticipated. And if brutality is in part a revolt against social conditions, the rise of these anarchic ideas, at least in so far as they reject war, retribution, violence which infringes other peoples' individual rights, and the techniques of power and police-rule, represent the reassertion of more responsible human standards against the automatic, sub-intelligent conduct of the bully.

Jack Lindsay vs. D. S. Savage

The Function of Poetry—A Controversy

I

D. S. Savage in his essay on *The Status of Proletarian Poetry* discusses some recent efforts made in the U.S.A. to reconstitute the Proletcult school of versifiers. In his onslaught on those efforts I consider him entirely justified; I should indeed be ready to support even stronger condemnation. The attitudes he cites, which seek to make culture an ancillary tactical weapon of political expediency, could only end in the total destruction of all cultural values, if they had their way.

I might add some examples of the philistinism of the U.S. Left-wing more recent again than Mr. Savage's, which show that little or no advance has been made on the positions taken by Forgotson in 1944. Following some promising notes by Isidor Schneider in *New Masses* early this year on the discussions at a writers' conference, Albert Maltz wrote an excellent essay calling for a more critical attitude, for the rejection of the stereotyped political judgment in dealing with the complex content of art-work worthy the name. Schneider added some sensible comments. The result was a furious outburst of attack of Maltz, who ended by weakening and retracting.

One of Maltz's points was to query the slogan "Art is a Weapon". He did not deny that art-expression implied values and therefore must in the last resort have a real relation to the life-process; but he pleaded for an end to the all-too-simple application of the statement. Applied directly, he pointed out, it became "Art should be a Weapon". That was a very different statement, which soon worked out as "Art should be a weapon like a pamphlet." The next step was the formula "All art that isn't a weapon like a pamphlet is bad."

There were some confusions and inadequacies in Maltz's own formulations; but almost all his opponents made no effort to sort out his comments. They merely wanted to knock him down, any old way. It would seem then that at least a considerable portion of the U.S. Left-wing intellectuals have learnt nothing and have forgotten a lot.

But, to return to D. S. Savage, though I agree heartily in disliking what he dislikes, I find that many of the terms in which he makes his attack seem to be as one-sided and withering as those of his opponents. And in explaining why, I should like to begin by clearing away a personal point, since it will help to establish my critical position. Mr. Savage refers to a pre-war periodical called *Poetry and the People*. He

says that it had much the same aims as those he is attacking in the U.S. Proletcult, and that it seems on account of the political shift to have died.

Firstly, it has not died. It was taken into *Our Time*, which still carries its name on its first page. And secondly, while in its origin it had many confused intentions and ideas, it could never have been said to line up with the U.S. proletcult. I happened to have been the leader of the Left-Book-Club Poet's Group which started it, so I may claim to know something about its aims.

Much of what we tried or hoped to do in those days was over-simplified in idea, based on a somewhat romantic view of the political world-situation. This over-simplification came from the fact that the Spanish war political issues seemed rarified to the level of spiritual conflict—directly so rarefied. The step straight from the bloodied olive-grove into exalted lyric or fierce tragedy seemed natural, inevitable, compulsive. This simplification was true enough in one sense—in the degree to which one was realising the bloody truth of the transformations going on among the Spanish people. But it was falsely effective in so far as one felt that the terms of the Spanish struggle were the terms of the whole conflict which was to decide the world's fate—the conflict which has gone through the terrible phase of the second world-war and now is moving into a new phase.

The Spanish people were meeting the attack of monopolistic fury, but they themselves were still largely a pre-capitalist society, with cultural and spiritual values dominant in their lives of a kind that have passed away in the more highly industrialised areas.

This political situation, partly responded to with realising sympathy, partly fantasied as something it wasn't, was linked with cultural attitudes of a similar confusion. A few writers, such as Ralph Bates or Malraux, who had some real understanding, achieved expression with enduring qualities. Others—such as myself—were overwhelmed with emotion, but lacked the contacts which might perhaps have turned the emotion into valuable expression.

That the experience did not beget any such expression does not mean that it was abortive or wrong. It may have fed other not-directly-related writings, or it may have provided a stimulus capable in time of bringing the poet more truly into the embrace of a real earth.

It is against this background that the aims of *Poetry and the People* must be understood. Every artist worth tuppence in our world wants to bridge the gap between art and the people, however he may dissent from other artist's ideas as to how the bridging can be done and or what such a bridging implies. In an industrialised nation the problem is acute. Lorca could go round with a wandering theatre and find direct contact with a people who still had folk-bases of song and music; there could still be a basic community of symbol between poet and audience. That community does not solve all problems: it raises some which do not exist for the poet in the area that has lost its folk-basis. But it gives a point of departure and return which do not exist for the latter poet, who can easily fall into a nostalgia for it.

Spain had that folk-basis; and in the response, partly genuine and partly fantastic, which we felt towards the Spanish struggle, it was possible to hope for a carrying-over of the folk-relation into the area where it did not apply. Lorca with his *romancero* might become X, the British poet, with his ballad or his song. Why not, if the Spanish struggle was the pattern of *la lutte finale*? And so, in that air of fervours, it was possible to think of a political song which was merely a song, a political satire which was merely love and anger and a quickness of the pulse, pure as an anger of wind or charging waters. It wouldn't work out that way, but it was a good feeling to have had, all the same. It wouldn't bear fruits on the root-cut trees, but I'd rather be able to look back on those illusions than on parlours of private emotion from the windows of which a soberer and narrower consideration of facts would have been possible.

How did it work out in *P. and the P.*? In an effort to revive the broadsheet ballad, to discuss poets such as Henry Lawson who in Australia carried a folk-tradition at its last gasp into a new life, to think up ways of bridging the gap, whether by devising forms of declamatory verse for mass-meetings or songs that could be intruded into pubs. Why not? There is nothing wrong in such efforts, even if there is often not much that gets anywhere; but it's a long way to the proletcult-position which says a poem is no good unless it can go before the meeting or the bar. What was futile about the effort was the total misjudgment of the situation both in its political and cultural relations. The Spanish struggle was not the stark pattern of the Last Battle, nor was it possible to recapture a folk-audience in Britain by good intentions.

The way-round was a lot more complicated, and we're a long way off the goals yet. We are nearer the battle-end and nearer the creation of a people's culture in Britain; but both nearings have come about through a hellishly involved development and conflict, which is going to get both more involved and more simple before the end.

And that brings me to my points of dissent from Mr. Savage. He attacks all "poetry with a purpose, actually, functional verse." Perhaps he uses words with private meanings, and means no more in that statement than that poetry in which a consciously-willed aim stands over against the material is bad poetry and must lack artistic integration. But after all the term functional has a fairly precise use in biology, in anthropology, in sociology; and I shall pay Mr. Savage the respect of considering that his words are more than private mouthings and carry the full reference of their normal usage.

Functional? All art begins with a directly functional aim. The paleolithic paintings with their rich organic rhythm were simply done for purposes of fertility-magic. All primitive art-expression is as uncompromisingly functional. In that fact lies the primary organising element which gives it its peculiar purity and force. The socially functional is perfectly integrated with the genetic or personal. The organic form is identical with the functional purpose. When the magical basis of tribal society breaks, this integration is broken, and the art-form tends to fall away from the functional co-ordination which

was the basis of the creative discipline and liberation. But it is long before the co-ordination is quite lost. It revives with enriched scope at all the great moments of renaissance, in the ziqqurat or cathedral which is functionally the centralising point in new urban concentrations, or in Greek or Elizabethan drama when the old functional folk-bases are fusing with upper levels of more detached cultural elaboration.

In England, roughly speaking, it is from the time of Dryden that the functional dynamic goes out of our literature. The poet becomes a professional literary man, with the cash-nexus seeking to control his activities. All movements of revolt react against the cash-nexus and the cut-off status; they posit, in direct or indirect form, the need for a more organic relation of poet and society. Their anger is against the loss of a satisfying functional relation, for which an unsatisfying one has been substituted. Hence the romantic theories of the poet, which, while uttering truths about the necessity of the poet's work in human integration, speak in inflated, mystical or exaggerated terms.

It is then from the time of Dryden that we talk of a definite dissociation between art and life. In one sense, of course, art and life are always indivisible, since dissociated art will be the expression of the kind of life where dissociation rules. But we can't just leave the matter at that, and say that what is is—that expression must equal what is expressed. The laws of Newtonian action and reaction do not cover the emergence of new qualities, and art which is doing its job is precisely the emergence of new qualities in men.

When we speak of a dissociation to be overcome, we speak in the name of the potential unity that we feel in throes of birth inside and outside us. We are seeking to understand, to express, to aid the formative processes which make the living man. That is the great function of art, its deep-rooted necessity in the nature of man; the function which appears nakedly in primitive society, whatever the magical explanations of the ritual act.

Art, to be creative, must do more than reflect or utter existing social activities or personal attitudes. It must begin from the actual, the existing co-ordinates in individual and society; but it must dissolve all this in the realisation of the potential. To do so, it must penetrate deep into the truth of conflict inside and outside the self; otherwise it will not lay hold of the living polarities from which the potential unity can alone come into existence.

Hence the way in which bad or uncreative art reflects what men, personally and socially, think to be the facts of their world and themselves, and thus achieves a superficial harmony. But good or creative art grasps the underlying conflict shrouded by that harmony, and out of it creates the next stage, the future, the integrations which aid the formative processes of history and without which, in the full analysis, they could not come about. Hayley might seem to the readers of his day to be giving poetic expression to their lives and thoughts and aspirations. But to Blake he appeared a monstrous exploiter of existing dissociations and divisions, and his harmony to be a mere hypocritical disguise.

This particularly violent contrast—between the poet who exploits existing relationships and resolutions to gain a cheap response, and the poet who turns instead to the conflict from which emerges the new potential whole—has been the ruling aspect of our literary scene ever since Dryden, in whom something of both sides appears. It reveals the particular angle of the struggle against dissociation which must be the primary concern of the contemporary poet.

"It is of the essence of genuine poetry that it is not functional," says Mr. Savage. "Its aim is not to do but to be."

I shall continue to pay Mr. Savage the compliment of thinking that his words mean something. In the above sentence he puts forward his positive programme. "To be" can be taken in either of two senses. Poetry aims at being something, or it aims at nothing but being. But if it aims at being something, it is immediately part of the stream of process, since a something cannot but be involved in the whole complex movement of polarities, of division and renewal, which is reality. It is entangled in the world of doing as well as being, and Mr. Savage's distinction falls to the ground.

It appears then that he means poetry aims at nothing but being. But the art of pure being is the empty canvas, or rather the void where once the image lived its moment of renewal. The poetry of pure being is the buddhist silence. Once a word is used, you are back in the sphere of action.

The two absolute contraries thus turn to be equally empty of true human quality. The mechanically marching feet or the void of God: what is specifically human has evaporated in either case. Art does not admit the purpose of the proletcult; but that does not mean the only alternative is the buddhist contemplation of one's lotus-navel. There can be a purpose of integration, a purpose of moving wholes, as well as the fragmentary purposes of the deliberate will; and those deeper and fuller purposes do not operate by a transcendental grace, they involve various movements of the deliberate will as well as impulses of the genetic self. For they are of the whole man, and the whole man includes will. The ultimate directive does not however come from the will, which may at certain points of growth be fighting against the formative process, and yet even in that fighting may be contributing a necessary element to the full basis of development.

Thus, Dante had a conscious purpose in his *Divine Comedy*—indeed several, which were bound up with the phase of historical movement in which he lived. He also had numerous incidental purposes as he worked on, momentary angers and loves. And beyond all those purposes, threading them and indivisible, was a deep creative purpose for which he had no words except the words of his poem. All these purposes, the immediate or more general political purposes and the deep organic urge to integration, were required to make up the real poem. None can be abstracted without murder to it. Without the conscious purposes the living thread would snap, and the poem would fade out into the void. It was this that Goethe meant when he said that all poetry was poetry of circumstance.

Mr. Savage, however, makes a further statement of what he wants: "true integral personal poetry, which is centred structurally within itself, and the view of life which gives absolute significance to the individual personality, and relates history and politics to that centre." In so far as that statement means to emphasise that all genuine art is organic and that this implies an organic unity as well as a structural development, it will be clear that I agree. But it seems that Mr. Savage is saying much more than that. He speaks of an "absolute significance" in personality, which is the Centre to which history must be related. The words are large and vague, but if they mean anything they must mean that personality is absolute—that is, it does not exist in the stream of process and does not develop; it is a given quality and quantity which can mysteriously emit simulacra of itself but which does not create out of a marriage between its own genetic elements and the outerworld; and history is an aberrant force unless it admits this absolute power of personality and falls into place as a mere scenic background.

Such a viewpoint ignores altogether the problem of the formation of personality. It assumes it as ready-made, born with full rights and powers. As a reaction against the theories which put everything on to environment and omit the genetic factor, there is something to be said for this one-sided approach. But it is one-sided, as hopelessly so as the position it attacks, and therefore in the long run must lead to as distorting and tyrannical an effect. Personality, as modern analytic psychology has shown, develops out of the conflict and harmony of genetic and social factors in the self. The genetic remains infantile without the social; the social would utterly lack real content, would never come into existence at all, without the genetic. Any theories which omit one of these basic factors are doing a murderous disservice to the human cause. They are aiding the forces of dissociation, and that is why Mr. Savage ends by betraying the cause of human integration as badly as the proleiculters he attacks. By isolating personality as an absolute, he severs the roots and inhibits the process of integration, which must be a matter of polarised unities. The real world knows no absolute centres, in Mr. Savage's sense. What it does know is an infinitely complex movement of wholes, where each whole is organic in so far as it successfully holds together vitally polarised forces and substances. Development as a result goes on inside and outside: the whole is ceaselessly modified internally as the balances shift and re-fuse, and externally as its relationship with the changing outer world changes.

Our job nowadays is to understand that process, though a poet has to understand it as a poet and a biologist as a biologist. But the poet will not be adequate to his own and the age's needs of integration if he puts his all on political action like the proleiculters or on an absolute internal centre like Mr. Savage. Politics come into it; and there are moments when a poet like Milton or Wordsworth, Aristophanes or Pushkin, Blake or Catullus, can validly write out of a direct and immediate political emotion. But the dogmatic reduction to

politics is destructive, and so is the dogmatic reduction to an a-political personalism.

JACK LINDSAY.

II

It is with surprise, as well as gratification, that I find my article on proletarian poetry has evoked from an apologist of literary leftism so interesting, so moderate, and so seemingly concessive a reply as Mr. Jack Lindsay's *Function of Poetry*: seemingly, because although Mr. Lindsay grants the wrongness of the *prolet-cult* approach to art and is even ready "to support even stronger condemnation" than my own, I fail to find in his article any clear expression either of assent to or dissent from the crucial point of my article, which, agreed to, would substantially unite our respective viewpoints and relegate his discussion of "function" to a secondary position, and disagreed with would make his defence of "functional" poetry more straightforward and, I am bound to say, more consistent than it is. I mean, of course, the point that all poetry, irrespective of category, must be subjected to an identical aesthetic test, which must have regard primarily not to the *doing* of a poem, but to its *being*. I cannot but feel that Mr. Lindsay is a little equivocal here, and that I must record this slight protest before proceeding to an examination of his apology for a poetry of "function".

In my criticism of the functional character of politico-proletarian verse (and while I may sometimes be guilty of loose phraseology I do not think I am so in this instance) I took my stand on the aesthetic test, which should determine first of all the *integrality* of any given poem, "its state", to quote my own words, "of being a true entity, with its own centre of gravity." And I pointed out that "a poem which does not itself achieve this kind of organic wholeness, integral equilibrium, can only be the product of a writer who has not himself managed to organize his perceptions, emotions and ideas into an integral pattern." It was then that I went on to associate the disintegrality of "social" poetry—verse which has its end exterior to its own structure—with a view of life which denies the integrality of the individual person and makes him subsidiary to the social or historical process, and to associate the "true, integral *personal* poetry, which is centred structurally within itself," with the view of life which "gives absolute significance to the individual personality and relates history and politics to that centre." The very question of poetic integrality is ignored by Mr. Lindsay, who gives no certain indication to how he proposes to define the qualities of a good poem, in relation to a bad one, and in what way this pivotal question of discrimination relates to his own, "functional" outlook. This is significant, because it is obvious that Mr. Lindsay has no sympathy at all with that view of individual centrality which, I have suggested, is the truly poetic view of life.

Mr. Lindsay's own outlook, it is clear, is that of historical materialism. He takes the view that life, civilization and culture are expressions of a total "stream of process"—of that "whole complex movement of polarities, of division and renewal, which is reality," to use

his own words. Within this total, enveloping stream, which seems to recognise no distinction of subject and object, and to stand in no constant relationship to the realm of values, of which all that exists is involuntarily a part, development takes place by a process of fissure, of conflict, and of reintegration into unity. It is on this basic interpretation of the world that Mr. Lindsay attaches his rather original "functional" theory of aesthetics. Art, according to him, "to be creative, must . . . begin from the actual, the existing co-ordinates in individual and society; but it must dissolve all this in the realization of the potential . . . it must penetrate deep into the truth of conflict inside and outside the self; otherwise it will not lay hold of the living polarities from which the potential unity can alone come into existence . . . Hence the way in which bad or uncreative art reflects what men, personally and socially, think to be the facts of their world and themselves, and thus achieves a superficial harmony. But good or creative art grasps the underlying conflict shrouded by that harmony, and out of it creates the next stage, the future, the integrations which aid the formative processes of history and without which . . . they could not come about." "All art," says Mr. Lindsay again, "begins with a directly functional aim." And its function is, apparently, to lead "creatively" from a state of cultural and social dissociation towards one of cohesion. Poetry is forward-looking, progressive; it is "the emergence of new qualities in men", and the poet, feeling within and without himself a "potential unity", is seeking "to understand, to express, to aid the formative processes which make the living man."

It is difficult to deal adequately in a small space with an aesthetic theory leaning thus heavily upon a world-outlook of so disputable a character, and I hardly know how to reply to Mr. Lindsay's specific points without first calling in question the entire framework of materialistic-monistic progressivism to which they are attached. But to take up a few of those points. I had always thought the artist to be the creative subject, the work of art the created thing, but Mr. Lindsay speaks in terms which seem to endow works of art with some incomprehensible sort of dynamism of their own. Further, this progressive view of art seems to attach it to the movement of history in an unwarrantable manner. I would like to know precisely in what way the *Divine Comedy* or the *Paradise Lost* can be said to draw its significance from the extent to which it has aided in the generation of what was previously only a potential (cultural) unity, and in what way the work, say, of Mr. E. E. Cummings or of Mr. Robert Graves, in our own day, can be said to draw its significance from a subservience to the same social function. I would like to know how it is that a poem which has presumably served some such temporary function nevertheless retains its significance for successive readers when the unity which it is supposed to have brought to birth has long ago split up into new conflicting entities calling for newer creative resolutions. And I would like to know many other things before I could even begin to take serious notice of Mr. Lindsay's interpretation of literary history. It is doubtful whether Dante or Milton interpreted his own creative activity in any such manner as Mr. Lindsay suggests—and they were not un-

intelligent men. They are much more likely to have been concerned to write a good, integral poem. It is even more doubtful whether any modern poet writing with eyes on the politico-historical situation at the moment will assist in the birth of any such hypothetical unity: he is more likely to miss writing a good poem. Of course Dante and Milton were involved, as men, in specific historical situations; of course the modern poet is no less involved and has not less responsibility, as a man, for a creative understanding and acceptance of human responsibility. But it is one thing to accept this fact, and quite another to attempt a total interpretation of their work's significance in terms of its "creative" historical functions. And it does seem rather a long hop from the work of a Dante or a Milton, or even a Henry Vaughan or a Charles Cotton, to the latter-day concern of organs like *Poetry and the People* with thinking up ways of bridging the gap between poet and public "by devising forms of declamatory verse for mass-meetings or songs that could be intruded into pubs". There seems to be a dislocation somewhere.

But to get nearer to the crux of the argument, it is plain that Mr. Lindsay's real quarrel with my viewpoint is its affirmation of the central significance of the individual person, and obviously this is a difficult bone to swallow if, like Mr. Lindsay, you prostrate yourself before a total world-process to which individual persons are merely incidental or contributory. My words, says Mr. Lindsay, are large and vague, but "if they mean anything they must mean that personality is absolute—that is, it does not exist in the stream of process and does not develop . . . and history is an aberrant force unless it admits this absolute power of personality and falls into place as a mere scenic background."

Very well, then; but before I take this up I must make it plain that I do not accept this arbitrary conception which Mr. Lindsay seems to wish to foist unexplained on the unwary reader, of life as a monistic "stream of process", nor is there anything in Mr. Lindsay's argument or outside it which compels me to do so. Nor am I fascinated by chiliastic doctrines of "progress". And I do not deduce, as Mr. Lindsay seems to do, personal, cultural and spiritual realities from physical, biological and social ones. If the biological flux in which, as humans, we are involved can legitimately be spoken of as a "stream of process", there is still no necessary continuity of process from biological life to moral existence and artistic creativity. It is a travesty of my own viewpoint to assert that because I do not accept the theory that it "develops out of the conflict of genetic and social factors in the self" (more than genetic and social factors are involved), I assume personality to be "ready-made, born with full rights and powers," just as it is to suppose that I "isolate personality as an absolute." Personality, to me, is a spiritual, not a natural category: not something given but something to be achieved, and which in collective humanity exists only potentially. My point is that the individual is a real centre of existence, the focal point, in fact, and that outside individuals there is no point of focus for historical events—least of all in some chimerical total "process", or in the hypothetical goal of that process. Within

the individual, personality may come into being, and it stands then in an immediate relationship to the absolute, which fact lifts it from submergence and disintegration with the "stream of process", but this in no way removes the individual person from participation in the vertical realm, unrecognized by Mr. Lindsay, of values.

But to return to the "function" of poetry, the "being" and the "doing" of the individual poem. Here again one sees Mr. Lindsay's odd attribution of creative dynamism to the work of art. "Poetry aims," he says, "at being something, or it aims at nothing but being." Perhaps Mr. Lindsay is using words carelessly, and does not really mean to imply that poems are such automotive entities, but I suspect that it is merely that his phrasing is involuntarily determined by his general fluidity of outlook. Of course a poem does not itself aim at anything. It is the poet as creator who aims, and he aims, if he is a true poet, at constructing in the medium of words an entity which shall in itself equate and harmonize disparate elements of his own experience, and in which those elements are interfused and unified by value. I see no ground for the assumption that such an entity, by existing, "is immediately part of the stream of process", and I likewise see none for the corollary that if it is not part of this stream it must, *ipso facto*, be a void, a buddhist silence, an empty canvas. But here we come to the disputed question of the relationship of art to life, and so much of what Mr. Lindsay says and implies on this matter is so strongly reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's views on poetry, with which I happen to have dealt elsewhere, that I will test the reader's forbearance with a quotation of my own remarks. "Paradoxically," I wrote then, "the devaluation or impoverishment of art, undertaken for the sake of 'life', leads also to the impoverishment of life, since art is one of the prime creators of values whose function it is to introduce qualitative differentiations into life. Art must necessarily stand over and above what we may term man's mundane life, that is to say his mental-sensational life as it exists at its everyday level. Yet even at this level life is the product of cultural values. From this life, with its gradations of value, art takes the material for its organizations. But art does not, of course, stand above in proud isolation, a static, finished, crystalline world, an end complete, perfect and sufficient in itself. Art, although it is in a very real sense an end in itself, is nevertheless inevitably drawn down into life, into the flux of mundane living. The values which art has crystallized are absorbed back into 'life', and mundane experience is enriched with new significance and meaning, given a new qualitative intensity. This significance cannot be given to it by bad art, art corrupted by 'life'. Art cannot, therefore, be properly used as a medium for conveying 'life'. Life is what we are given, art is what we make out of what we are given; and art must not retrogressively dissolve back into primary life: it must go forward in obedience to its own centripetal laws and allow itself to be claimed by that secondary life, the distinctly human, personal spiritual life of values."

Mr. Lindsay's views differ from those of Lawrence by virtue of the fact that on to the latter's vitalistic biologism he has superimposed

a socio-historical progressivism, but both writers alike wish to bring art in subservience to a fluid stream of process.

It will be seen how my own views on the nature and "function" of poetry, allied as they are to my general personalistic outlook, lead to a view of culture radically different from that of Mr. Lindsay, and imply a cultural programme far removed from his tribal populism. Even if it be granted that "every artist worth tuppence wants to bridge the gap between art and the people", there is still a vast difference between those who would modify art in order to bring it to "the people", and those who would modify "the people" in order to bring them to art—if the question of cultural homogeneity can adequately be posed in these terms, which I doubt.

For it seems that Mr. Lindsay, in this as in other matters, is the victim of that general tendency to fluidity which is the outcome of his reduction of everything to its functional rôle within his "stream of process." So that when he speaks of the "functional dynamic" in literature, he is really touching on the somewhat distant question of socio-cultural homogeneity, which in reality is not primarily an artistic matter at all. The homogeneity lying behind the artistic expression of the mediæval cathedral and Greek and Elizabethan drama was founded on a community of religious beliefs and practices, and this cultural ordering is still valid, and for the modern poet in the act of composition to be influenced by the functional considerations Mr. Lindsay proposes can in practice lead only to the sort of muddle confessed by Mr. Lindsay in his comments on the activities with which he was associated at the time of the Spanish Civil War.

I think Mr. Lindsay is mistaken in his outlook: mistaken first in his view of reality as a total "stream of process", mistaken in the function he ascribes to poetry of midwife at the birthpangs of development within that process, and mistaken in the inevitable consequent minimisation of the individual. In this connection I find several of his incidental remarks illuminating. For instance, his statement that in the civil war "the Spanish people were meeting the attack of monopolistic fury", which ingenuously calls up the image of human solidarity in the face of some non-human principle or force, whereas a less biased and simplified assessment would perceive merely that the Spanish people were divided in internecine conflict. Mr. Lindsay's reactions to this war were indeed too simple; but his whole world-view is a basic oversimplification from which these incidental oversimplifications follow quite naturally.

What, one may ask, is the goal of Mr. Lindsay's developing stream of process? The attainment of socio-cultural unity, one presumes, in the classless society of communism? If so, one sees the relevance of his initial appeal, in his vindication of functional poetry, to the art of the tribal society. We are to have a renewed tribal collectivism, on a "higher" level. But Mr. Lindsay's conception of sub-individual collective human solidarity within the all enveloping "stream of process", to which is tied as a corollary his functional theory of poetry, is a phantasm. It is nothing but the social expression of his philosophical monism, a basic oversimplification, which

in turn arises out of his inability to grasp the significance of individuality and all that it carries with it for life and thought.

The perception of individual centrality breaks up both the "stream of process" and the total, unified collective of the human mass. But it is in no way therefore a-historical. It merely disrupts the gross oversimplification within materialistic historical progressivism, which assumes a simple, unwarranted advance of each generation collectively (at whatever expense of conflict between "progressive" and "reactionary" alignments of forces) over its predecessors. While there is undoubtedly a meaningful process at work within human history, and while the possibilities for a future cultural homogeneity of some sort higher than the deadening level of an enforced communist or fascist collectivism must needs concern every responsible writer, these are strictly secondary matters which the poet, the critic and all creative individuals will serve best by endeavouring to realize the highest values they are able in their lives and their work, here and now. And for the poet, above all, this means *integrality*.

D. S. SAVAGE.

Louis Adeane

A Visit to Madame Zena

The two hands, one small and sandy, the other large and smooth, crossed the hot grey road from the beach. They were gliding towards the row of booths and the tea-tables clustered in the shadow under the red and white awnings. That was how the little boy imagined it: two joined hands floating above the ground and their bodies drawn along anonymously on either side like the wake of a small fat boat. They reached the kerb. Soft tar moved in thick lazy waves into the gutter; millions of little lights sparkled from the granite in the sun. Quite close passed a party of grown-ups, barefooted, and a girl holding a spade and bucket. The bucket contained one crab. Their laughter sounded a long way away, for just in front he saw a tall bank of pink and orange rock, leaning backwards, and a man in a white coat standing in the dark narrow opening between the tiers. His mother's hand moved, gently disengaged itself, fumbled for a moment in her brown bag; then the white coat was holding out a peppermint stick and his fingers had curled round its smooth cool firmness. He undid the twist of transparent paper and it crackled. "Thank you, Mummy," he remarked, taking her hand again as they went on to the corner, "And now," he tugged expectantly, "are we going to the fortune teller, now are we, Mummy?" He bit off a piece of rock and his mouth was full of crunchy odour and sweetness.

"You must call her a clairvoyante. Not a fortune teller."

"Now are we going to the clairvoyante? Up this hill?"

"You'll see." His mother liked secrets. In his mouth the peppermint clung to his tongue, fragments breaking round his teeth and hiding between gum and cheek. In the sweet dark, that was a secret too. Then ahead of them on the pavement he saw four feet climbing on their own, two brown shoes and two black, walking rapidly on their shadows out of sight. "We must run," he said, pulling ahead of his mother after the fugitive feet, "let's run, Mummy," but she leaned back and replied: "You are keen on your fortune, aren't you?" laughing at him. 'Keen', he thought quietly, was the wrong word. That had to do with winter and snow on the eyelashes. He resigned himself to walking slowly and took another bite of peppermint.

"Here we are. Let me wipe your face. And put that awful stuff away."

"It doesn't need wiping." He stopped and carefully folded the paper over the wet end of the peppermint. When he took it out of his pocket, he knew it would have little bits of dirt on it just the same. He extended his tongue for her handkerchief and she dabbed the material round his mouth. "That will make me sticky," he pointed out, but she took no notice. He saw that they were standing outside a shop with blue muslin curtains and hanging beads in the window. Above was a card: *The Blue Cave: Teas Served*.

"I thought we were going to see the fortune teller Mummy. Can't we have tea afterwards?"

"This is where she lives. In this café." Briskly, she scrubbed his fingers.

He had always thought that *cave* was pronounced 'cave'. His mother straightened up, tidied her hair, patted her bag. The future became more impressive at every moment. Then she took his hand and led him to the door. It displayed a card: *Madame Zena: Clairvoyante*, and round the name spun little golden stars and circles. He was dazzled, the initial zigzagged, as his mother pushed down the blue door-handle and they entered a warm smell of coconut ice and the sound, fading, of a bell above their heads. He looked up and it was a knobbly silver bell. He had never seen one like it before, nor had he seen such a lamp as the one that glittered from the middle of the ceiling, hung with blue glass beads. They walked up the room and all around the cool orange tables spread their glass tops, each with a vase of flowers and a wine-red ashtray. His mother said something and he sat down in a wicker chair with a satisfying creak, staring about him. A little door marked *Private* must lead to the kitchen. In the corner sat a man with a bald head shining above his newspaper. The little boy looked up at the blue beads, trembling gently as if to remind him of his entry, glancing again at the polished head, and asked:

"Where is the fortune teller?"

"Ssh. Clairvoyante. She is receiving a client. We must wait."

"But where *is* she, Mummy?" (*Receiving a client. A thin, secret phrase*).

"In there." She nodded and he saw a heavy black curtain across a doorway. He had never imagined a black curtain. Seeing *Teas Served* he had thought for a moment that it would just be cup-reading,

like his mother's. From behind the curtain now he could hear a low suggestive murmur. His hands were sweating. He wriggled and almost wanted to go to the lavatory.

"I expect," his mother offered casually, "that she will give you a Full Reading."

Suddenly the curtain swished aside and out came two young ladies, clutching their bags and hurrying to the door. His mother rose, obscuring his view for a moment; a voice cried gladly: "So *there* you are, love"; he saw in the doorway a voluminous friendly figure holding out its arms, and his mother was enfolded. Behind her back he saw two puffy powdered hands squeezing so that the rings sank into the flesh. He had not known that the fortune teller loved his mother. He saw Madame Zena's welcoming face blooming at him over her shoulder and was hers at once.

"Come in, come in. And this is Norman. I've waited a very long time to see you." Her warm voice was like honey, the deep sugary kind. He was guided through the curtains (they smelt of dust) into a tiny room. Madam Zena's soft skirts billowed by and there she was seated behind a green table, the skin crinkling round her grey eyes as she smiled at him. She had silver hair. She was splendid and there, oh there behind her head he saw the stars in constellations across the dark blue sky, the Milky Way suspended, the planets moving, all the great wonders of the Zodiac outspread. On his left he noticed suddenly, there was a big wheel with strange figures where the time should be, a crab, fishes, a goat, innumerable wonders. He sat upright on the edge of his chair. He could not speak.

As she talked to his mother he saw her hands moving about the table, emphasising one by one the separate objects on the green surface. She tapped a flat round box, squared a pack of cards, gently revolved a red ashtray. There was a bundle of black velvet. All her actions were calm, assured. She sat in her calmness like a monument. She picked up a small blue jug of Parma violets and pressed them to her nose. Then she opened the box, took out a cachou, put it into her mouth, and said:

"Well, we must start work."

At once his mother was silent, attentive. She took a pencil from her bag and some pieces of paper. She prepared to write. It seemed to the little boy that her writing and what was said by Madame Zena had nothing to do with him. He was fascinated by the amber beads that lay, like lemon lozenges, across the full confidence of the fortune teller's bosom. The beads sparkled as she leaned forward. He longed to taste them.

"When were you born?"

"June the 16th," said his mother for him.

"Then you are Gemini." He did not listen for more; he watched Gemini hang in the air like a jewel. Slowly it dissolved as if on his tongue.

Madame Zena took up the cards, shuffled them quickly, turned them, the black and red pips appearing and disappearing between her fingers. She held them out and said: "Now Norman, just take a

card and give it to me." She took back the card he chose and in a moment had laid the others round it on the table. She began talking to his mother again. The pencil made a soft noise on the paper.

"Now give me your left hand. Face down."

Her touch was soft and warm as she pressed his finger tips, bent his fingers. She turned his hand over and looked at the marks in the palm. She spoke of the Lines: The Line of Life, the Heart Line; then, with no change of tone, of the Girdle of Venus and the Mount of the Moon. It was as if she had made the universe. She noted a cross and was pleased; he watched the pleasure radiate over her large queenly face and deepen the creases curving down on either side of her red mouth. She was like God. When he took back his hand he clenched it tight so that the Moon should not slip away.

There was a knock by the door. Madame Zena leaned back. "Come in," she said to the girl who entered, and she reached up gently and powerfully for the tray. "Thank you. You brought a cup for Bryony? And the cake? Yes, a chocolate one. Thank you." A slave-girl, the waitress withdrew. He had never heard his mother called Bryony before, but she didn't seem to mind. Madame Zena set the cake before him, square, glossy-brown, and embroidered with pink comforts. "You have a sweet tooth, like me." Kindness crinkled her eyelids, humour smiled in her cheeks. But staring at the cup of tea she was stirring, he did not eat. It was the first cup of tea he had ever really seen: a thick blue cup with a crescent of light glancing round its edge. There was a little white chip out of the saucer.

She sipped, smoked a cork-tipped cigarette, and talked to him. "You are very imaginative, you have an artistic temperament. You want too many things at once and they divide your purpose. You are going to have great power for good; you are psychic and will help the world . . .", but while she spoke she was unwrapping the black bundle with one hand and he was only half-listening. The velvet fell away and there was a shining solid crystal, trapping the light. It was beautiful. He held his breath.

"Now I want you to mind this for me in your hands." She extended it to him and he took it, amazed. "Hold it tight." He held it in his palms and it was cool and heavy like a world. Lights slipped and flickered within it like fish. "There is a lot of rose in his aura," said Madame Zena aside to his mother. "Dark red too. Passion." She leaned toward him and said: "You must always be kind to ladies. Always. Do you understand?" but he didn't understand. He held the world in his hands.

She pushed her cup away and leaned her cigarette in the ashtray; a spiral of blue silk ascended. She spread out the velvet, a black square. "Now give me the crystal. Look into it with me." She leaned over the crystal in the middle of the square and he too peered into the glassy depths, aware of her perfume and with his brown hair close to her silver. There was complete silence except for the soft burning noise of the cigarette. "I think I can see a beach," she said, an island," and yes, he could see it too, quite clearly, an island with

palm trees and a hut against a blue and white sea. "You are going to travel," she went on as the interior of the hut swam into view, a dim room with red hangings, and a man appeared with a brief case under his arm, a sharp-nosed man with dark eyes. "You are going to be a painter I think, something to do with big sheets of paper . . ." and he saw that indeed it was not a brief case that the man was holding but a large folder. The picture faded but she went on looking down. "You must be generous because you will have great power, you have a trust that you must not betray . . ." She gave him his burdens, looking up solemnly between each one. ". . . and don't forget: always be kind to ladies . . ."

Before they reached the door he was saying: "When shall we see the fortune teller again, Mummy. When shall we?" pulling at her hand as she turned and smiled her goodbye, as she said gaily: "Tomorrow, perhaps," waving, opening the door and pushing him out by the shoulders. The cake was melting in his hand. Without waiting for her he started off down the hill towards the crowded beach, toward his future bobbing with the boats on the wide, receptive sea.

Thirty bob, she thought, and looked up at the sky. A pound for last week's rent. She moved away from the café and slowly descended the hill, a heavy, shabby old girl with a weak heart and chalk at her ankles. (Scorpio's were taken that way.) She looked at the sea; she was apprehensive. But the breeze had dropped flat on the water, leaving it calm and reassuring. If the weather was good she made money; otherwise not.

She turned the corner, walked slowly past the long row of booths. Men were rolling the canvas blinds into their slots. She thought of crossing the road to get the smell of the sea, but she was too tired and her feet hurt her already in these shoes. She looked down at them, a withered leather pair that had once belonged to Bryony. She had had to cut slits in the sides. All along the pavement rested the trodden wreckage of the day: ice cream cartons, cigarette ends, sand, torn newspaper. It was like walking through a fairground when the caravans have gone; even the holiday makers had a scattered exhausted look as if they had arrived too late. They trailed damp bathing costumes in the tired evening air. The immense sadness of the world oppressed her; she went into the delicatessen bar and treated herself to a meat pie. It was bad for the astral body, but surely she had to eat. Every evening now she bought a pie, for she must not be ill, she dared not be ill; every day she destroyed herself and her means of keeping alive. At night in her room, she looked at her hands and saw that the aura was yellowing, the electricity was going out of them. She could have wept as she trod heavily home along the almost endless sea-front, past the illuminated gardens and the shrubberies, towards the girders of the gasometer and the scenic railway in the Kursaal beyond the pier. A steady descent it had been, all through her life. Now she had a room in one of those grimy little houses; she had lace curtains and an aspidistra.

The lower window was open when she reached the gate, towels

and costumes were hanging on the sash to dry. Wet or fine, Mrs. Harp made a good season. She felt for her key and moved slowly up the path. She had had to rest twice on the way home. Quietly, before she reached the step, the door opened inwards and instead of the key she drew the pound note from her bag. She passed in and without a word, put it into Mrs. Harp's hand. Mrs. Harp's fingers closed over the note and silently, violently, twisted it into a small packet in her palm. Her eyes snapped. She jerked her head toward the parlour door and said :

"A man for you."

Her tiredness was such, her shame was such, as almost to drive her into the parlour under Mrs. Harp's dominating eyes. But she resisted that weakness. She put her hand on the varnished banister post and said : "Send him up to me please, in five minutes from now." She climbed the stairs and her pride went with her. She had paid the rent.

Rapidly, in her room, she lodged her coat behind the door, dragged the screen across to hide the unmade bed, opened the window, dusted the round table with her handkerchief, settled her bag upon it, and sat down with her back to the light. It would be, she supposed, a client wanting an appointment. But how had he obtained her address? She waited. Her feet hurt her, but there was no time to remove her shoes. Behind her the evening cries of the children sounded from outside, sharp and broken like the wings of birds. Then she heard a fumble of feet on the stairs, Mrs. Harp's direction came shrilly : "First on yer left," and there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," she said, leaning back, her hand calm on her bag. (Her face was a sight, but she couldn't open the bag now.) The handle turned, the catch gave difficulty, then the door opened and a small man stepped into the room. At once it was evident that he was not a client. He had a sallow pointed face and bright pointed shoes. He glanced round, found her, and stated in a quick, edged voice :

"You are known as Madame Zena? You have an establishment at 154 Seaview Rise, on the premises of the Blue Cave Café?"

"That is so." She corrected him gently : "I exercise my profession there."

"Ah." The little man looked about him again. His black hair shone pale in the light from the window. As if she were the stranger, her glance followed his round the room. The tarnished washbasin, the wardrobe, the spotted mirror in its bamboo frame : dominating everything, the maroon-coloured, frayed screen . . . and revealed in the dust under the bed, this morning's teacup with a brown stub in the chipped saucer.

"I wish to have a talk with you. May I ask my colleague to come in?"

"You may." Her heart gave a sudden twinge, but her voice, she noticed, was quite steady. She shifted her feet. She had been interviewed by the police before.

The little man gestured briefly at the open door and a heavy, middle-aged individual entered with his hat in his hand. He was bald. He closed the door and took up a stance in the shadow, his hands folded across his stomach as if in prayer. The little man said:

"My name is Crawley. Detective-Inspector Crawley. This is Sergeant Brown. It is my duty to inform you," he added sarcastically, "that anything you say may be taken down and subsequently be used against you."

"Will you be seated?" With a professional gesture she indicated a chair and he brought it to the table. He laid a black leather brief case before him and sat down. "Are you bringing a charge against me?"

"We would like some information. First, have you, ah, exercised your profession at the Blue Cave for long?"

"For four years." He had, she saw, a small wet mouth that twisted as he talked.

"Four years. A long residence. Now. We have been informed that you claim to tell the future . . ."

"I have not made that claim."

" . . . we have been informed that you claim to tell fortunes by means of palmistry and other devices. You have received money for this purpose."

Pictures flickered briefly through her mind. That commercial traveller on Monday; the bald-headed man to-day . . . she looked up sharply at Sergeant Brown. She said carefully: "I don't think I have received money for telling the *future* . . ."

Wearily, Inspector Crawley's hand went to his pocket. "Would you, or would you not, describe yourself as a fortune teller?"

"Well . . ." She remembered Bryony's little boy with the love in his aura. "Yes. But . . ."

"You would." He produced a tube of peppermint tablets and popped one into his mouth. "You profess to tell fortunes with intent to deceive and impose?"

"Certainly not. All my clients have been quite satisfied . . ."

"You are mistaken in that. According to our evidence you have told fortunes that were inaccurate and deceptive. To receive money for such professions is to impose. I refer to the Vagrancy Act, Section Four. We shall issue a summons in due course." He added, unconscious of irony: "It is not my business to judge. I am here to protect the public. You are free to produce your own witnesses if you wish." He undid the straps and rustled in his brief case.

"But my good name. Even if I produce witnesses . . ." Like a lightning flash, the sharp pain in her chest lit up the blank future. "I'll lose my clients, won't I? Who would speak for me; I don't take their addresses. I shall lose . . ."

"A solicitor, no doubt, would advise you." He brought out a blue form and a fountain pen. He unscrewed the cap.

"It costs . . ." she began, but he seemed quite beyond pity. like God. She thought of the ten shillings in her bag. She had faith in human nature: people were good and greedy. But without that

ten shillings . . . Her feet ached and already she was hungry.

"When before the Court, you may apply for free legal aid. Now I would like to see your Identity Card."

She had faith. She had only to find what was human in him . . . and besides, she had a chance, hadn't she? She had acted the lady so far. She opened her bag and the unwrapped meat pie was revealed.

He did not smile. He was not surprised. She fumbled and said: "I'm afraid I've left it at work."

"Work." Sergeant Brown spoke quite tonelessly, as if his voice were a flat line beneath the word.

Inspector Crawley leaned forward, fountain pen in hand. Fugitively she imagined the feel of it: smooth, firm, something to hold on to . . . She drew a quick breath and shuffled the ten shilling note out on to the table between them.

He looked at it coldly. After a moment he remarked: "Bribery will not help you. Now, is this your proper address?"

Without support, she was signing her own future away as he wrote down the information. She was being thrust back into childhood, helplessness. He looked up and asked: "When were you born?"

She lurched to her feet. "Before *you* were, young man. What d'yer mean, coming in here without a warrant and bullying me around as if I was a criminal? I come of good family, I never done anything . . . I got a good name. I never . . ." She sat down, groped for her dust-grey handkerchief. Weeping before him, she felt as if she had committed some crime.

He laid a card on the table. It looked like a driving licence. "This is my warrant card. It gives me authority to question you. We were invited into the house. I have met your kind before."

"My *kind* . . ."

"We will let your age pass. What is your name?"

"Madame Zena."

"Your real name."

"I've told you. Zena, it is, Zena, Zena, *Zena* . . ." A hot band gripped her round the chest and she steadied herself on the table.

"I mean," he clarified politely, "your real, legal name. Your name in Law."

She stared at him like an animal. "Smith," she said, almost with wonder, "Miss Smith."

When they had gone she got up and went over to the mirror. She stared at her own reflection. She saw herself with all the cruelty she had for them. The purple lips, the puffed-out hair, the flabby double chin. She felt dizzy; she leaned on the wall. On the floor there was a piece of paper. It was the wrapping from a tube of peppermints. She moved to the door. She would not go down the stairs. But little stabs of pain in her chest drove her down, stair by stair, to the brandy in the kitchen and Mrs. Harp.

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The little boy could not sleep. He lay on his back, his hands hot and clenched, his eyes staring up to where he painted his future on the dark. It was something tremendous. He would have power. He saw himself walking in a mirror with a great portrait in his hands. To-morrow: to-morrow he would make his mother take him to the fortune teller. He would make her. 'Be kind to ladies', she had said. What could he give her in return for the world? He pressed his hands together and was in an agony, torn between generosity and desire. She had a sweet tooth. The remains of the peppermint burned under the pillow. He must give it to her to-morrow, a present, he must, he must. He pressed his palms together and the world burned between them, all his future burned there like his love.

André Breton

The Colours of Liberty

Ranged above our heads, the flag-like windows forever unlit continued to lap up their measure of air. They had the dimensions of those flags of red cloth which in Paris flank certain highway works and from which there stand out, in big black letters separated by dots, the inscription "SADE" which has often returned to me in reveries. The red flag, free from any mark or inscription: this flag I shall always see with the same vision that I had at seventeen when, during a popular demonstration just before the other war, I saw it unfurled by thousands, low in the sky of the Pré Saint-Gervais. And yet—I feel that reasoning is powerless to intervene here—my pulse will continue to beat yet more powerfully at the evocation of that moment when this flamboyant sea, in places flowing but thinly and restrictedly, was pierced by the soaring flight of black flags. At that time I had no great political consciousness and I must admit that I remain perplexed when I take it upon myself to gauge what degree of consciousness I have since attained. But, more than ever, the currents of sympathy and antipathy seem to me strong enough to demand the submission of ideology; and I know that my heart was set beating, is still set beating, by this day's very movement. In the deepest galleries of my heart I shall always rediscover the swaying to-and-fro of these countless tongues of flame amongst which a few linger to lick a marvellous carbonised flower. The present generation will hardly be able to imagine for itself a spectacle of that order. As yet the heart of the proletariat has not been rent by innumerable factions. The torch of the Paris Commune was far from being extinct; there were many hands there which had held this torch—a torch binding all together in its great light that would have been less beautiful, less true, without a few spiralling wreaths of thick smoke.

So much individually disinterested faith, so much resolution and ardour could be read in these faces, so much nobleness too in those of the veterans. Around the black flags, to be sure, the effect of sheer physical suffering could be sensed more strongly, but passion had really burnt itself into some eyes, had left there unforgettable points of white-heat. It will always seem as if the flame had spread over them all, burning them only less or more fiercely; serving to maintain some in their absolutely realisable and well-based demands and hopes, whilst leading others, more rarely, to burn themselves out on the spot in an inexorable attitude of sedition and defiance. The condition of humanity is such (independently of the ultra-amendable *social* condition which man has made for himself) that this last attitude especially—to which there is no lack in the history of the intellect of illustrious respondents, whether they be named Pascal, Nietzsche, Strindberg or Rimbaud—has always seemed to me absolutely justifiable on the emotive plane, leaving out of account the purely utilitarian reasons for which society may repress such an attitude. One is compelled at least to recognise, in oneself, that it alone is marked by an exaltation and the pride which overcame me, when as a child I was taken for one of the very first times into a cemetery, at this discovery—among so many depressing or ridiculous funeral monuments—of a slab of granite engraved in red capitals with the superb device: NEITHER GOD NOR MASTER. Poetry and art will always retain a preference for all which transfigures mankind in this desperate, irreducible demand which—now and then—he takes the derisory chance to make upon life. The fact is that above art and poetry also, whether one likes it or not, there beats a flag—in turn red and black. There too time is urgent: it is a question of ensuring that from human sensibility is drawn all that it is capable of giving. But whence comes this apparent ambiguity as to the colour? Perhaps it is not given to any man to act upon the sensibility of other men in order to mould and enlarge it, except at the price of offering himself as a sacrifice to all the scattered forces in the soul of his time: forces which, in general, only seek for each other in an attempt to pronounce mutual exclusions. It is in this sense that such a man is, has always been and, by a mysterious decree of these forces, *must* be at the same time their victim and their dispenser. Thus, the same is necessarily the case as regards a certain taste for human liberty which, called to extend the field of receptivity of all to practically infinite proportions, draws down upon a single person all the baleful consequences of immoderation. Liberty does not consent to caress this earth a little except in taking into account those who have not known or have only partly known how to live because they have loved her *to a point of madness*.

Translated from the French by SIMON WATSON TAYLOR.

Poetry

Three Poems of Drowning—

W. S. Graham

I

Workman on the unleashed drowning floors, what can
You make of it so packed round with the king's unruly
Fullfed ministers, the air turned fraud to their lungs
And under the breath-hushed ceiling of the open sea?
So emerald rigged, your gardens hang their Babylons.

So wandered, bowed into a new affection to inhabit,
You'll likely wake white as salt and lean from the sill
Heavy with shoulder-perching waves of the flocking sea
To ask me down under the fighting. Far over early
This morning's wide sea you speak at the white threshold.

Over the early sea-show the speaking ceremonies
Wave me a word of warning and rescue's gesture
By my eyes landmarked in a prison of breathing my crowds.
All working hands throw up, raged in dry images,
The time-combing lintel of foam and door of breath.

II

Now endured sea-martyrdom crucified by the soldier sea,
Hoisted high to nails, crowned over the inventing host
And struck through hammering, his all grief well over
The moneychanging manfed water; he has left me
Changed by the stampede side of foam swept through.

You numbering skylights where the sent light enters
The seadeep heart, can you not hear the music
Still held in his plundered heart far forsaken
All by my ear. The seafared pulses roar.
His settling hair swims longer round his eyes.

Now left, I'm to wear my lifesave slow in the air,
Ark set on the crowd maintaining the hideout heart
And loud uneven seas. My ships fill mercifully
At last done down to nothing but locked into under
The grave-mounded sea kept under with a stone.

III

Wakened by drift and drowned words cast in darkness
Loud to the flying shoals and breath of my sleep
I walk out saved into a good family sea-gentled
Into calling me here. The men of the world knock through
My scaled seawalls call accent to the unwinding voice.

Their bubbled seabelled sky and the rushing shoulders
With screaming bundles of foam over their home fathoms
Lock them shaped under out of their smiling lifestories.
My eyes on shore stare the crying spray to my mind,
Light lost not to build a lament or pay dry prayer.

Now in these seas, my task of the foam-holy voyages
Charted in a bead of blood, I work. I answer
Across the dark sea's raging bridges of exchange
Proclaiming my own fought drowning, as loud laid under.
All arriving seas drift me, at each heartbreak, home.

Italian Gardens—William Porritt

Leaden sisters face their leaden lovers
round the garden pool, and glance to glance
lament the seven stepless steps
that stay their central kisses.

Flowers by them sing in plotted places
yearly sweet the song inherited,
sounding for these luckless lovers
sighs their lips have petrified.

Evening winds insist the legend,
cool and smooth the facing thighs;
then warm from lips too long desiring
the winds embracing mock the wish.

Birds in pity heard this pleading
took leaden love, warm-winged, to waiting lovers.
Nine months ten times then multiplied:
now children dancing spill metallic laughter.

Poem for Three Persons— Louis Adeane

Alone is she gone and does he remain
Alone with the shadows of her steps on the stairs,
Brief birds on the branch as light as her glance,
Petals of rain on the sleep-soft pears?
Gleam of the stream winds into his eyes,
Tree with a stammer shakes a leaf of words.
Again is she gone and is he alone?
See the dappled serpent where his eyelash lies.

At the eve of his eye is she left,
 Adrift in the mirrors, aflame in the room,
 Slow tongues under glass and dark of her dance,
 Shadow of shift on her breast in the gloom?
 Candles burn gold in the ring of her calm,
 Clock with a circle binds a sheaf of chimes.
 Bereft is he left and is she adrift?
 See the stranger smiling in the turn of her arms.

Ablaze in his praise she burns and betrays.
 O blessed be the bridal on the twice-tindered bed,
 Quick phoenix arise in the breath of his touch,
 Perfume bewilder her fire-kissed head.
 Stranger be warm in her keeping from harm,
 Far from your hunger find a harvest-hearth.
 Is she at ease in the close of his eyes?
 See the autumn apple at the heart of her dream :

Awake as a look she walked
 Magic down the avenues of frost on the panes,
 Crisp leaves underfoot as white as the path,
 Fingers of blue through the mist-held planes.
 Cold was the end of the street of the year;
 Wind with a sickle struck the heart from love.
 She turned in its hand and returned
 And found her lover waiting in the street of his fear.

So will she wake and go back,
 Forsaking the stranger and seeking the stair
 Where love saw her step into sleep and once
 Rippled the light of her stream-washed hair?
 Eve of his eye she lies and is still.
 Still as a stranger sleeps the harvest house.
 O wind, be kind at the end,
 When all are one and are changed and are gone
 Under the blackthorn of the white-hung stars.

Post Victoriam—Neque Dulcem Neque Decoram. Jackson MacLow

1

Now that the dead and dying are foreclosed
 on, their effects, such as they are, disposed
 of to the highest bidder, and each name,
 duly recorded, forgotten, with its fame
 (such as it was) intact, that is to say,—
 forgotten—

No! Not this tone! Can I not pay
some tribute to these deaths, some human feeling
such as they deserve, without concealing
nature beneath ambiguous irony?

—Now that *these* degrees of tyranny
triumph, they who died unwillingly
at last alone, in private—for the gain
of public hypocrites—are mourned alone,
in private. I, alone, in private, mourn.

2

Heroic courage wasted for the cash
and power of public faces! for the trash
of public nonsense! Let me honour here
those who died as cowards screaming Fear!
Fear! and the pain of human deaths, to curse
the public vampires riding on their hearse;
mixed with the mud, burnt with the flakk'd plane,
dissolved in the oil-soaked sea, who squealed their pain
and cried for Mother, mixing salt with salt,
forgetting at last the Hep! and March! and Halt!

And those who died in private and at home
beneath the dinner table in the room.
"secure from all but direct hits"; and those—
—but *each* and *each* and *each* and *each* bestows
a transient garland on *these many*: *each*
no *each*, for *one*, and *one*, escapes all speech.

3

Now that each dead, each dying, is dying, dead,
and public alchemists above his head
turn blood to fluid assets, bones to bonds,
and flesh and breath—to fame and empty sounds
(each public voice exuding from its face
and trickling into every private place,
like bird-lime binding all into the State
till freed into anarchic private crates)
and all begins again "just as before"
that is to say, continues, peace and war,
the private mourning keeps a public silence
and private tears mean public acquiescence.
(And horror yielded—public celebration!
The street became a place of recreation
where milling jitterbugs killed dissident sleep
with shrill-voiced brass and well-slapped basses deep.)

The man of business—the man of state
 find much to mutually congratulate :
 they wish there were more worlds to *liberate*.
 When war is such a cornucopia
 who can believe the peace is here to stay?
 But profit's changeable; sometimes there's more
 in "peaceful" exploitation than in war :
 and peaceful trading, now the wiser course,
 does not preclude the threat and use of force!
 Then who dare be dissatisfied? Why see :
 we'll have both peace and war, in closest harmony!

4

We who by addiction and by choice
 address the public in our private voice
 can, if we reach, but little hope to please
 ears that have only heard the public wheeze :
 our honesty is queer, our anger mad ;
 we're sentimental when we dare be sad ;
 our work shows we're neurotic, and our play—
 —shows we're neurotic : who'll hear what we say?
 When we're exact, the cry is we're obscure ;
 the literal word is termed a metaphor ;
 the metaphor's a paradox, perverse—
 —and when we bless,—the critics say we curse!

When taste is formed on corporation prose
 the candid protest seems a mannered pose :
 by private anger, cloth'd in "outworn" styles
 provokes in private readers public smiles.

Unfathoming Slumber—Charles Fox

By sacrifice I am becalmed
 in waters where no green-nipped pain
 lies idle, where the chagrined sand
 chafes restlessly across the floor.
 Lulled by a prosody of waves
 that whimper on the shore, like words
 of frothing horror from the lips
 of age-dead mariners, whose skulls
 lisp anger of the elements,
 and guardian of their graves a fin
 pokes warning, an isosceles
 of fear. Here do weeds wrap my bones
 and lobsters' tendrils stir my brain,
 shells are my pillow, my close shroud
 deep green, and my once-worried heart
 is now this brooding sea's domain.

Two Poems—Philip Lamantia

TWO WORLDS — 1946.

(For KENNETH REXROTH)

The wingless bird, only half-a-bird,
But having the power of flight
Locked in its spirit,
Threads through the prison seeking daylight.

Unresponsive blood through the veins,
The blood coldly, moving like ice,
Through walls, in which the almost dead

Sleepers have no hunger for flowers and flame
That wait outside and within these walls,
Even below the angel submerged in their hearts.

The ruins of the living are here,
Obscuring all light.
Dying roses fall among the crucified
Who lie in absolute separateness:
Dumb, distorted worlds.

How shall this wingless bird,
Outside and within all bodies,
Send forth its fire to the hand
That shall break the mirror of these walls
(As it would plunge into water
Or open the heavens).

How shall it regain its wings
To penetrate the day
Now releasing its light,
As light is released from the heart?

SORROW.

In anguish, I hear a voice
Singing of the wounded animal
Turning on winter's garland

Of dead flowers. For days he has lain
Remembering his autumn birth,
Watching fire give way to ice.

Unable to die, he suffers
For his beloved, knowing she has moved
Into a temporary death.

How much pain the dark tooth
Had cast his way
As it drove deep into his loin.

His sweet flesh is no longer embraced
By the sun's dark arms,
No longer healed by grass.

As I watch him, I wonder what alien wind
Drove the savage tooth, as a sea,
To his body's star :

Piercing and breaking the rib's bone
And opening his flesh to swift snow;
—To leave him quite alone, panting

In the silence. Waiting for the medicines
Of Spring to heal his wounds,
And accomplish the rebirth of his beloved.

Julian Symons

Freedom and Reality

1. LIBERALS AND LIBERTY.

Let us begin, where many end, with John Stuart Mill. His essay *On Liberty* conveys an idea of freedom, and an attitude towards it, which seemed irrefutable to liberal thinkers in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and finds many supporters in our own time—supporters whose pattern of thought follows that of Mill, even though it may do so at second or third hand.

The central theme of Mill's essay is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in infringing the liberty of action of any one of their number, is self-protection. In society's dealings with the individual, the only purpose for which powers should be exercised over any member of a civilised community is to prevent harm to others, since that is the only part of his conduct for which he should be answerable to society. But further: in all those areas of life in which the individual's actions affect society only indirectly, he should have complete liberty. Liberty of thought and feeling; freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical and speculative; liberty to express and publish any opinion; liberty of tastes and pursuits; liberty, further, of a number of people to

combine for any purpose not involving harm to others. "No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected is free, whatever may be its form of government, and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified."

The basis of this doctrine is that since we can never be sure of the truth or falsity of any opinion, its suppression is an assumption of infallibility which cannot be justified. Mill pursues this point at great length, and it is one that few will dispute, if matters which are scientifically verifiable are excluded. Even if opinion is false (Mill continues), it should not be suppressed, because it is precisely the continual conflict of opinion which enables us to arrive at truth. If what we conceive to be truth cannot be controverted—if we forbid that it be "fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed", it will turn from living truth to dead dogma.

That is a brief, and I think not unfair, summary of the doctrine advanced, in a lucid and persuasive style, in Mill's essay. I have paraphrased it at some length because it is a more comprehensive statement of the liberal position on the question of freedom than anything I know written more recently. Mill would perhaps appear to most liberals to-day a little idealistic, and they would not be disposed to claim so much liberty as he demands; but his pattern of thought finds echo in, for instance, editorials in *Polemic*. If we examine Mill's argument it will tell us something, not only about his own position, but by extension about the position of modern liberals and radicals.

If Mill's views are regarded as an abstract statement of what is desirable, they will meet general agreement; most people would agree that no society in which the liberties he mentions do not exist, can be completely free. But when it is suggested that we should *act* on such precepts it becomes clear that they are merely phrases, quite remote from the world of reality. Mill's use of the word "truth" is characteristic; since his whole case rests on human fallibility he is continually compelled to make the supposition that there are no veritable truths—the admission of one verifiable truth would spoil his argument—and also that there is a universal "truth" about everything, which will be known one day. At the same time he is bound also to make the assumption that his own argument is "true" or valid, for if it is not, his case does not exist. This assumption Mill does, of course, make without any uneasiness about the logic of his position. But if his own argument may be false, then it is possible that "liberty" may not be a desirable thing; and that it is good for men to have very little liberty; and therefore that the whole of his thesis is nonsense.

I argue in this way only to show that Mill's thesis, if taken literally, is a collection of verbalisms. These verbalisms Mill is able to regard as all-important, because he has no need to suggest their practical application. When that question does arise he shows, quite casually and off-handedly, that he has no intention of applying them to the events of his own time:

"An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through

the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer."

In other words, an opinion may be tolerated when it is purely verbal: if it is likely to lead to results in the field of action which imperil the existing state, it may rightly be suppressed. Mill was able also neatly to exclude from his conception of freedom Britain's vast nineteenth century Colonial empire: "We may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage . . . Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement." But who is to say at what point despotism ceases to be a legitimate mode of government, and turns into an outrageous persecution of the individual's rights to liberty? And since thought and speech have their ends in action, is it not evidently ridiculous to suggest that criticism of private property or of corn-dealers or of anything else should be permitted—providing such criticism is made in circumstances in which it cannot possibly be effective?

The only restriction Mill would place on freedom is that nobody should be free to commit anti-social actions. But again who is to say—beyond such elementary actions as rape and wanton murder—what actions are anti-social? As soon as one posits freedom as a "human right", it is impossible logically to set limits to it, for the limits are bound to be arbitrary ones, imposed by a view of the world which has already been proclaimed as fallible.

It is possible to see a way through this fog of contradictions only if one compares what Mill asks for *verbally* with what he asks for *in practice*. He demanded verbally an unlimited amount of "freedom", and says that no opinion should be suppressed, even though it may be the opinion of one man against the rest of the world: he asks in practice only for freedom for the section of the bourgeoisie to which he belongs. The liberal intellectuals of Mill's day were against the violent overthrow of the state—and therefore did not propose to grant any practical freedom to those who wished to overthrow it; they had no intention of relinquishing British colonies—and therefore they discovered that despotism was "legitimate" in dealing with "barbarians". No conscious hypocrisy is implied in Mill or his fellow-thinkers: the point I am making is that if you maintain freedom as an abstract principle, upon the basis of human fallibility, you cannot set limits to it. To take an example: if one says, as so many liberals do, something like "Freedom is a good thing—lack of freedom is a bad thing", the statement is meaningless unless it implies that absolute freedom which nobody is willing to grant. "Freedom", failing some definition of its nature, and its relation to reality, is only a word.

2. FREEDOM IS ONLY A WORD.

"Freedom" is a particularly useful word for those who like to use phrases which cannot be clearly defined, because a cluster of stock responses has gathered round it. Pronounced in a clear, persuasive voice, the word alone makes many hearts beat faster, brings a tear

to many eyes; and yet, unless it is defined, this freedom may be one to kill Jews or to teach the principles of Fascism. Such use of the word is possible only because the idea of "freedom" as an absolute good is planted in the minds of many people who do not bother to take this thought to its conclusion. Proceeding from an emotional reaction, rather than from thought, they are able to make some extraordinary additions to the idea of absolute freedom. Here is one of them :

Freedom is more than a word, more than the base coinage
Of statesmen, the tyrant's dishonoured cheque, or the dreamer's mad
In the image of simple men who have no taste for carnage
But sooner kill and are killed than see that image betrayed.
Inflated currency. She is mortal, we know, and made

These are the opening lines of "The Nabara", Mr. Day Lewis' well-known poem about an incident in the Spanish Civil War. I quote these lines because they show in conveniently small space how use of "freedom" as an abstraction can lead somebody who intends to write truthfully into statements which are by any standard sentimental nonsense.

Let us consider these lines. "Freedom is more than a word". To prove this Mr. Day Lewis chooses images of those who use the word freedom, in his view, with intent to deceive—the "base coinage of statesmen, the tyrant's dishonoured cheque", etc. But if freedom is more than a word, it is more than any *word*: more than the words of Marx and La Pasionaria as well as the words of Goebbels and Franco. To make an effective statement the poet should say that "freedom" means more than the words he values *most*, not more than the words he values *least*. The intellectual sleight-of-hand involved is obvious enough: yet "freedom" is a concept which so blurs rational thought that few people realize the falsity of Mr. Day Lewis's argument.

In his third line Mr. Day Lewis makes freedom a woman: and one is not making an academic point about mixed metaphors in pointing out this fact. "Freedom" seen as mortal woman is one degree further away from factual reality than the personification of nations as John Bull, Uncle Sam or the Russian bear. These are at least personifications of countries which have physical existence: "freedom" has no physical existence.

To body out further the illusion he has created, the poet makes freedom a *mortal* woman (more appealing than a goddess), who is *made*, rather confusingly, "in the image of simple men". This means on the face of it that freedom is the child of these simple men—"made in their image"—but it is probable that it is also meant to convey by suggestion that they carry round this image in their minds as a guide to their actions. This idea is strengthened in the fifth line in which the freedom "made in the image of simple men" becomes quite explicitly something that they carry round with them—rather like (it comes at least to my mind) an image of the Virgin Mary. Mr. Day Lewis is now far enough up the airy mountain to make his statement of what these "simple men" fought for in the Spanish Civil War. They fought—not for their homes, wives, children, or for any

ideological reason—but because of an image of a mortal woman named “freedom” was in their minds, and they could not see her betrayed.

It is obvious that this is not a factual or acceptable statement of the reasons for which anybody fought in the Spanish Civil War. Men fought for Anarchism, Fascism, Socialism, Stalinism, Trotskyism; to preserve their homes or because their homes had been destroyed; or simply because they were caught in the machine of war. Very many of these men fought for a Spain which would, they thought, be a better country to live in because of the victory of their political creed: but the better world of the Stalinists would certainly not have been a better world for Anarchists or Trotskyists, so that “freedom”, so far as it was a conscious aim, was seen always through the rays of an -ism. What is certain is that nobody fought in the Spanish Civil War for a personified image of freedom in the shape of a woman.

To those who say of this examination, “You are merely exaggerating a poet’s metaphors,” I reply that this passage contains untruths which cannot be justified by any metaphor, and that Mr. Day Lewis has, no doubt unconsciously, used the same propagandist methods as writers in the popular press when they demand “freedom” for “the Little Man” as his “heritage”. This quotation shows, in an exaggerated form to be sure, the use that we all make of “freedom” when we start with an assumption that “freedom is more than a word”.

3. FREEDOM AND POLEMIC.

Is there no sense then, the reader may ask, in which the word freedom has meaning? But of course there is: whenever it is limited to some particular case we can consider the merits of that case, and freedom is then no longer an abstraction. When a prisoner asks for freedom from jail, when in the last century men demanded that they should be free to organize in Trade Unions, when certain newspapers ask that every man shall be free to choose his own job, we can decide whether these freedoms are desirable (some of them may interfere with other freedoms which we find more important) without being bogged in the idea of an absolute freedom which must be granted in advance as good. When, however, George Orwell calls for “freedom of speech”, or the editor of liberal-radical magazine *Polemic* says that his paper’s aim “is to defend the freedom of thought and speech that has been painfully won during the past four hundred years”, such statements can refer to nothing less than an absolute freedom. The contrast between the verbal and the practical demands made in these statements bears a close resemblance to the contrast which I have already remarked in Mill.

George Orwell is sincerely concerned to defend what he regards as intellectual and political freedom, which he equates with freedom to be a literary or political heretic. But where political freedom, at least, is concerned, he believes like Mill that freedom should be allowed until the structure of the state is threatened. I do not know that Orwell has written anything about that old chestnut: “Should freedom of speech and action be granted to people who make propaganda for Fascism?” but he has certainly written about similar questions, posed

less crudely. His attitude can be conveyed by a fragment of Socratic dialogue, which represents fairly closely the course of actual discussion between Orwell and myself :

- S. If you had power to do so, then, you would not suppress Fascist propaganda?
- O. Not to-day. The Fascists are a negligible force in England now, and suppression is always a bad thing. First Fascists are suppressed, then Trotskyists, Stalinists, finally anybody who is opposed to the Government.
- S. But you were in favour of suppressing Fascist activities during the war.
- O. Yes, because then they were working for the Germans—just as the pacifists were, though most of the pacifists didn't intend to do so.
- S. What it comes to is this—you are prepared to allow Fascist propaganda just so long as there is no chance of it being successful. That's wholly illogical.
- O. Very well then, it's illogical. But two things are plain to anyone with common sense. First, suppression of political freedom is a very bad thing. But second, when you're fighting for your life against Fascism, you'd be a plain fool to allow a Fascist Fifth Column to flourish in your own country.

An argument very much like this one is used by almost all radicals in discussing freedom. I have given Orwell the last word in our discussion : but obviously his statement that "suppression of freedom is a very bad thing" is not acceptable if he is prepared to suppress others' freedom. When you say that you are prepared to permit Fascist propaganda, it is because you are saying, like Mill : "If there were only one Fascist in the world, we should have no right to stop him from expressing his point of view, because we cannot be *sure* that we are right, and he is wrong." But when there is a prospect of such propaganda being effective, radicals say, in effect : "The present state of affairs is not perfect, but we are at least sure it is better than Fascism. the Fascists must be suppressed." If they are prepared to say this in a time of crisis, there can be no logical reason why they should not say it at any other time. No question of a *principle* of freedom is involved, and it is important that this should be understood. It is a bad thing to assume that one is acting from principle, when one is acting from motives of convenience.

A similar confusion is apparent in POLEMIC'S editorials. I quote from POLEMIC 2 : "Our editorial policy may be said to be that of encouraging free speech in an authoritarian world." And from POLEMIC 3 : "POLEMIC upholds . . . what is loosely called the liberal values—using the word 'liberal' in its old sense of 'liberty-loving'. Its aim, before all else, is to defend the freedom of thought and speech that has been painfully won during the past four hundred years." But whose free speech, and whose liberty? Those of the Indian people, perhaps, who have suffered for many of those four hundred years under a regime of tyranny and semi-starvation? Those of the African natives who work for their British masters for a farthing a day? One could add to such rhetorical questions : but it is plain that the editor of POLEMIC has in mind generally freedom of thought and speech in Europe, more narrowly such freedom in England, and quite particularly freedom for a small group in England.

We can see more clearly now than in Mills' day that "free speech" and "liberty" do not exist, and perhaps has never existed, in England or in any other country. Any government will suppress (and English governments have frequently done so) minority opinions that seem likely to endanger the position of the ruling class; the freedom allowed to Englishmen by nineteenth century Liberalism was based upon the relatively stable structure of English Imperialism—a freedom founded upon Colonial oppression. The English ruling class is not more liberal, or more friendly to an ideal of "free speech" than the ruling élite in the U.S.S.R.; the U.S.S.R. is simply a much more advanced police-state, with an élite which has not yet become firmly established as a ruling class. The "issue truth-versus-untruth" which George Orwell has raised in *POLEMIC* is not an issue at all: in no country in the world would one be allowed to print factual reports on certain dangerous subjects. There is a position, certainly, from which one can maintain that freedom in one country is bound to involve oppression in another, and that one should fight for one's own freedom, even if it is gained by standing on somebody's neck: but that is not the position taken by *POLEMIC*. Behind *POLEMIC*'S statement about freedom of thought and speech (the statement mentions explicitly, we should note, the *defence* of freedom already gained, not its extension to those who do not possess it) lies the fight to maintain certain privileges—including various freedoms—won for a comparatively small number of people during the last few hundred years. Those privileges are threatened by the development of forms of society in which the ruling élite, and even the nature of the privileges given to that élite, has shifted. *POLEMIC* is therefore opposed to such forms of society. That is all quite intelligible: questions raised regarding undefined abstractions called "freedom" and "liberty" serve merely as a mask (I do not imply that it is consciously worn) to hide this reality. The reality behind the word "freedom", it should by now be clear, is power.

3. FREEDOM AND THE U.S.S.R.

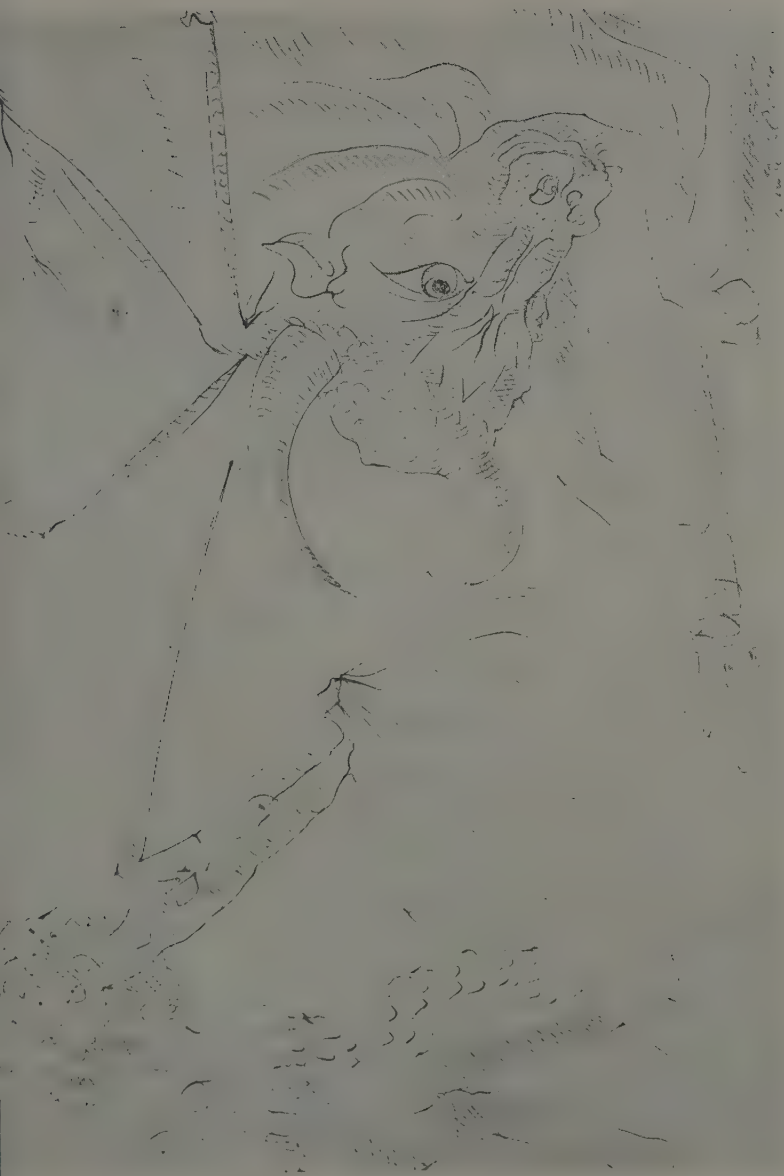
In the U.S.S.R. (and for that matter in any country ruled by a dictatorship) freedom is regarded in a very practical way. Individual freedom is simply the degree of liberty that the state can afford to give its citizens at a particular moment of history, having regard to its own internal and external safety. Is that not reasonable? In theory, one is bound to answer *yes*; in practice, one can say quite firmly *no*. For to the embodied state—the state that claims always to represent *all* of its citizens, so that any dissentients from an official view are obviously traitors—criticism is intolerable. The famous Russian "realism" that many of our intellectuals admire—that preference for *open* as opposed to *concealed* violence, for a frank acknowledgement of the basis of force on which society rests—has an alluring air of honesty about it. One is at least not hypocritical when one says: "X opposes the state. Therefore X is a traitor." But in practice, and in the world we live in to-day, liberal hypocrisy may I believe be preferable to such a destructive honesty.

This paradox can be illuminated by an example which may find

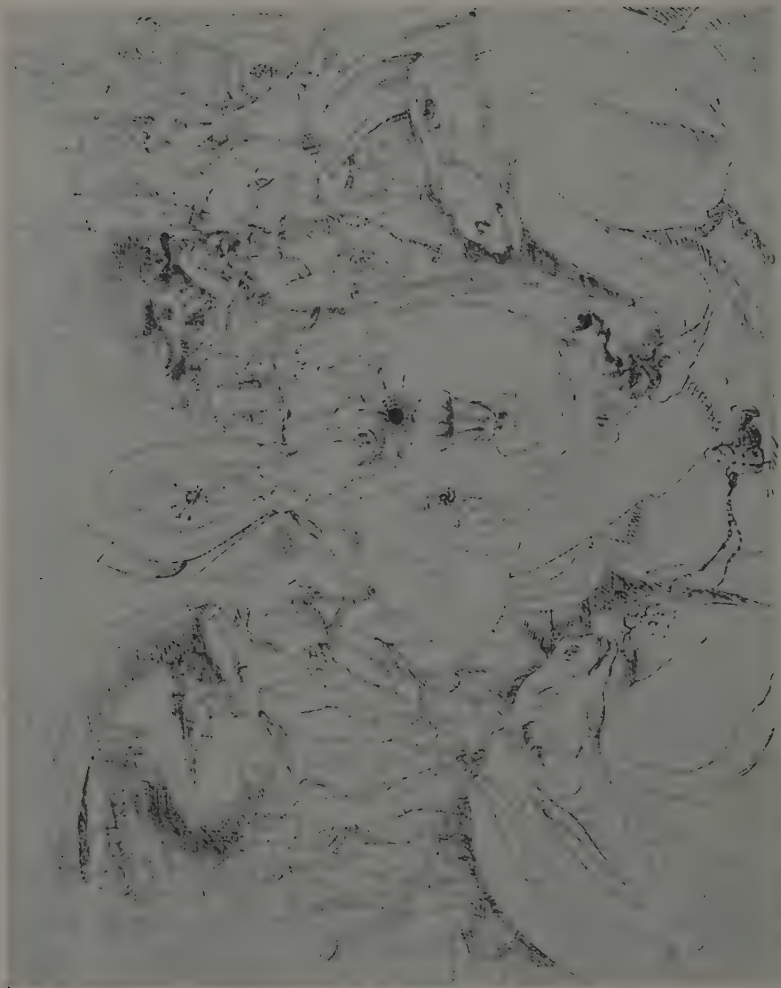
general agreement. The diplomatic technique which accompanied warfare during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the most repellently smug and hypocritical of masks hiding the face of power. What could be more disgusting than the Hague Convention, which made "rules" for the humane conduct of something absolutely barbarous? And all the nonsense about "scraps of paper" and little Belgium—or forty years earlier little Bulgaria, upon whose head the great Liberal poured his sanctimonious tears? To-day our ideas of warfare are more realistic: we know that wars are not fought for honour, faith, Christianity, or any such abstraction; we see that there is no reason why women and children should not be bombed equally with men; we accept starvation, rape, concentration camps, the extermination of cities, V weapons, the atom bomb—and we would accept poison gas, a death ray or any other means of destruction—as obvious corollaries of war. When you are at war why should prisoners be taken—unless they may be useful? Why should they not be starved, if one's own nation is short of food? This is realistic enough: but it is a kind of realism that is leading rapidly to the destruction of civilised life.

The attitude of the U.S.S.R. and its apologists on the question of freedom is the "realistic" one I have outlined. They make very much my own case against the sham nature of the liberal view: and they then argue that since the U.S.S.R. is moving towards a classless society, and since it is only in a classless society that freedom can be anything more than an abstraction, those who have the cause of freedom at heart must support the actions of the U.S.S.R. They point out also that the whole conception of freedom in a Socialist society has little relation to the freedom to hold different opinions from those of the existing regime, which is demanded by Mill. The need for such freedom vanishes (it is said) when a people's government is in power: since the individual is integrated in society he has no need to rebel against it or oppose it. Only traitors to the people will exercise their right to absent themselves from work, for instance, and this freedom is therefore subject to severe penalties. But as Lenin said, "While the State exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom there will be no State." The apologist for the U.S.S.R. envisages a fresh form of society, which looks still very far away. One does not bring about a fresh and higher conception of freedom by stifling those "freedoms" which are given in bourgeois states to a section of society, and at the same time *increasing* the power of the state. That, quite plainly, is what has happened in the U.S.S.R.

It is difficult to discuss this question adequately without discussing the class basis of society in the U.S.S.R.: and that obviously cannot be done within the limits of this article. But certain conclusions may be drawn from admitted effects, and observations can be made about the relation of those effects to causes. If, for example, a Fascist tells us: "We Fascists look forward to a unified world in which nobody needs to work more than three hours a day, in which no man is exploited



1. THE BULL FIGHT by André Masson. (London Gallery Collection)



4. HIGH MASS AT PAMPLONA by André Masson. (London Gallery Collection)

by another, and no minority is persecuted", he may believe what he says: but the evidence of Fascist oppression and persecution does not permit us to believe that such a future can be brought about by such means.

There is no doubt that many adherents of the U.S.S.R., here and in other countries, are perfectly sincere in their belief that it is moving towards a classless society in which the state will "wither away" and a truly human freedom will exist for the first time. That is not to say that anything of the sort is taking place. The great theoreticians of Communism all had firmly in mind a day not very far ahead in which the state apparatus would wither away: and they laid down a canon of morality for Communists to achieve that end (not to achieve the creation of a super state). It was emphasized in this Communist morality that every advantage should be taken of the "freedom" granted by social democracy or capitalism: at the same time Communist morality demanded the strictest adherence to factual truth from Communists themselves, and the expression on every occasion of their ultimate aims. Thus, at the same time that they signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the leaders of the U.S.S.R. branded this treaty as one imposed on them by force. Interpretations of actions and situations may vary, but it is never permissible by the standards of Communist morality to falsify or equivocate regarding historical facts: once such falsifications and equivocations enter into the actions and statements of a Communist regime it is merely playing the game of power politics more "honestly" (but what does honesty matter?) than, for instance, a Labour Imperialist power. But such games of power politics have nothing to do with the "freedom" which the rulers of the U.S.S.R. still have as their nominal end.

It would be pleasant to think that other people with Left Wing views could find at least a common ground for discussion of these matters with Communists: but painful experience will have shown anyone who has tried to find such common ground that it does not exist. The U.S.S.R. is regarded by otherwise rational and unsentimental people as a kind of fixed pole of virtue by which the activities of all other political and national groups may be judged. These adherents do not judge all groups (including the U.S.S.R.) by the standards of theoretical Socialism: instead they equate Socialist theory with the policy adopted by the leaders of the U.S.S.R. Once this has been done judgments are ready-made; and discussion, except on minor matters, has become useless.

Everyone outside the Communist Party will be able to agree that Communist parties, in the U.S.S.R. and elsewhere, have very often pursued policies which have nothing to do with Socialism or freedom: members of the Communist Party will not agree because for them *any* action of the U.S.S.R. is an action in support of Socialism and freedom. For the sake of the record let me note three very varied actions of Communist Parties which seem to me quite incompatible with anything except naked power-politics.

(i) The campaign of lies about Trotsky. I do not refer to the Moscow trials (although nothing substantiating the accusations linking Trotsky with the Nazis appeared at the Nuremberg trials): I refer to falsifications of history, such as omission of the part played by Trotsky in building up the Red Army, alteration in historical works of his role in the Civil War, minimising of his importance as a figure during the first five years after the Revolution, selection of attacks made by Lenin on Trotsky for quotation, and omission of friendly letters and remarks. Up till the time of Trotsky's expulsion from the U.S.S.R. it was accepted that he had performed great services: to take two trivial instances, "The Errors of Trotskyism", a collection of essays published by the C.P.G.B. in 1925, pays tribute to Trotsky's sterling worth, while criticising his position at that time severely; and elsewhere Mr. Douglas Garman, who now occupies a position of some importance in the Communist Party, in 1926 said in a very favourable review of Trotsky's "Where is Britain Going?" that "Trotsky is the most authoritative spokesman of the (Communist) party . . . he has no equal in this country in the arena of political exposition . . . he orientates the central facts of our history to the central thesis of revolution." But at the Moscow Trials it was stated that Trotsky and his followers had been plotting against the Soviet Union since 1918: so that Trotsky never rendered any services, and could not have put an authentic revolutionary point of view. Was Stalin then deceived about Trotsky in 1924, the C.P.G.B. in 1925 and Mr Garman in 1926? If they were, how deceptive Marxist theory can be!

(ii) The attitude of tolerance, and even friendliness, surrounding the Nazi—Soviet pact ("Fascism is a matter of taste": Molotov). Here again, it is less the pact itself than the attitude of the U.S.S.R. towards it that seems to me objectionable from a Socialist point of view. It is the many changes of attitude towards the Nazis, Roosevelt, Churchill, etc., which make it plain (to anyone not a Party member) that the Soviet Union's movements have been motivated not by theoretical Socialist motives, but by simple self-preservation and self-aggrandisement. The final comic touch from the point of view of theoretical Socialism is laid on when, after having proclaimed that World War II was a "capitalist war" until June, 1941, the Soviet leaders discovered that it had really been "a war of liberation" all the time. Marxist theory had fooled the boys again!

(iii) Many similar changes of front have been found necessary by Communist Parties on domestic and other issues. One of the most comic and unjustifiable of them was the sudden switch of the American Communist Party regarding Earl Browder—praised on his birthday in the American *Daily Worker* as "our beloved leader", and less than a week later reviled as a "capitalist lackey". The changes of view of Communist Party literary critics regarding André Gide, James T. Farrell, John dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Edmund Wilson, and many other writers, are too well-known to be discussed at length. (Some of them were charted in 1938 in the *Partisan Review*.) The point here again is—to hammer it home—that these changes of front are dictated quite simply by power politics; that is, by causes quite extraneous to the theoretical Socialist merits of Browder's "Teheran line", or the literary merits of Gide, Hemingway or dos Passos. The recent Russian Culture Purge, when Pasternak, Eisenstein and Shostakovich (among many others) were severely castigated for writing poetry "isolated from the masses of the people", a film article that was "profoundly erroneous . . . that in essence advocated art-for-art's sake", and composing music lacking "warm ideological conviction", is an example again of something that has nothing to do with the values of art as they have been understood for some hundreds of years. Or if questions of Marxist principle *are* involved, hadn't Marxism better be abandoned, since it induces Marxists to call Trotsky at one time "A man almost as universal as Leonardo da Vinci" (Mike Gold) and at another to discover that he was really a traitor all the time; one day to say of André Gide "He would not resort to mendacity even if it could 'prove' what is most dear to him" (New Masses 1933), and the next to

call him a liar; one day to say that Max Eastman is a hero and another to say that he is an enemy of mankind? Need one take the point further?

To sum up: long training in Communist morality enabled the leaders of the U.S.S.R. to ignore the deceptions of liberalism; and gradually the pressure of events forced them away from the factual truthfulness which alone could justify such a morality. We see the result in the U.S.S.R. to-day, in an attitude more "honest" and to me more shocking than that of decaying free-enterprise capitalism.

5. FREEDOM AND HUMANITY.

This essay has been confined up to this point to an attempt to show the relationship between some verbal conceptions of freedom, and reality. Thus, the reality of radicals' demand for "freedom of speech" is freedom of speech for themselves: the reality of the Communists' talk about "a higher conception of freedom" is subjection to the state apparatus. It is important that these relationships should be understood: knowledge of them will help some to clear their minds of cant about such words as freedom, democracy, totalitarianism, which should not appear in the pages of a serious magazine without definition; and others to clear their minds of cant about the Soviet Union. But such an essay is incomplete if it does not outline the writer's own attitude towards freedom.

It seems to me that little more need be said of freedom as a general principle than was said by Lenin: that it cannot exist until exploitation has vanished from the world. I suggest to all liberals, radicals and communists who find the word "freedom" rising frequently to their lips, that they should hang these texts, and Lenin's too, in the living-room, instead of keeping them in the attic:

"Labour with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where Labour with a black skin is branded."

"While there is a lower class I am in it; while there is a criminal class I am of it; while there is a soul in prison I am not free."

These admirable "unrealistic" statements tell us all that we need to know about the conditions in which real freedom can exist for humanity.

Are we then driven to-day to make a choice between these two attitudes? To defend uncritically the "freedoms" that are granted to some of us in England and (though less and less) in other countries; or to acquiesce in their destruction in the cause of the U.S.S.R.? I believe that there is a third way. I suggest to the editor of *Polemic*, Mr. Orwell and other Socialists—including the many people I know in the Communist Party who are sincerely concerned for human freedom—that they should approach questions of freedom frankly as Socialists and not by talking or thinking first about the position of the U.S.S.R., or about "free speech" and "a tradition of liberty". Free speech is a sham; the tradition of liberty does not exist; and yet individual freedoms are real, and valuable. Do not let us abandon voluntarily, or try to restrict, such freedoms as the right to strike, the right to agitate for a man to be released from prison, the right to speak and write freely: on the otherhand, do not let us talk cant about

granting freedom of speech to Fascists because all human views are fallible. Do not let us forget that the freedoms we have were given by governments which found that they could afford such luxuries: but let us take our stand on the position that while a coercive state apparatus exists in any country, these freedoms must not be abandoned. They are instalments, pitifully small, of the freedoms that we all hope will be achieved for everybody one day. They are, in fact, a glimpse of human freedom.

Victor Serge

The Writer's Conscience

I wish to consider this problem only under the most formidable aspects of immediate reality. These notes are by a writer who has the feeling of having fought for twenty years in the middle of events which are more and more suffocating, and where continually, and in various ways, he saw men (and works) perish whose essential vocation was to express responsibility.

I have recently received from afar, and by circuitous means, two simultaneous messages which complement each other in their tragic significance. The literature of our time of cessation of war without peace, that is to say, without reconciliation of the victims, without impulse towards a reconstruction of the world, without renewal of our confidence in man, reflects, more than anything else, anguish. It shows what a narrow margin of creative freedom is left by social reality to the intellectual, even when the latter, in order to give himself a vivifying illusion and doubtless to raise himself to the height of nightmare, is pleased to affirm, like certain French authors, "a vertiginous freedom". If to-day, however, there were sufficiently sincere exchanges, if we did not live isolated by immense imprisoning partitions, we should perceive the singular apparition, in Russo-Soviet literature, of a beneficent clarity. Amid the crowd of war books, sometimes written with an undeniable talent, but whose general theses, furnished by the relevant Bureaus, are known in advance, a few poems have arisen which carry the official stamp only in the same way as a soldier bears his uniform. It so happens that one suddenly perceives the man under the uniform, and that this man has an intense face, a personal silhouette. The Regime of Directed Thought has reasonably decided that in the times of the blackest sufferings it would be necessary to accord some relief to the human soul; and it has authorised on one hand a religious renaissance suitably supervised, on the other a lyrical poetry strictly limited to the great theme of love. Love is indeed more dangerous to tyrannies than one would believe at first sight. They know it. The man and woman must not find, in the exaltation of the couple,

absorbing evasions likely to lessen their zeal for work, their obedience to the supreme orders of the state, their devotion to the Leader . . . I remember a young worker "tired of ideology" who wrote to the old Maxim Gorki: "I would like the peasant, instead of embracing his tractor, to embrace the peasant woman, I would like fields where not nails would grow but grass, I would like to amuse myself!" And the great writer, having become official, replied in an angry tone, "To amuse oneself—that is the oldest slogan of the parasites: Let others work, while we amuse ourselves" (*Pravda*, 20th December, 1931). The most remarkable lyrical poet of Russia, Serge Yessenin, lived, for precisely that reason, under a galling reprobation which led him finally to suicide, in 1925. Some years later, the same internal conflict brought to suicide the poet of hope in the dictatorship, Vladimir Mayakovsky . . . But in times of war, perils less psychological than lyricism menace the absolute state. It thus becomes wise, since all youth is frustrated of the right to life, to permit the song of love which, if it helps to live, can also help to fight and die. The fact is that, by the side of a patriotic prose overwhelming with its monotony, the Russo-Soviet literature has just produced some poems of love of a noble vigour and of a freshness of sentiment and thought which would suffice to show that the Russian man continues to live deeply, even under the heaviest constraints. I have before me the 9th number of the review *Znamia* (the *Standard*) for 1945, which contains the poem of Margarita Aliguer, *Your Victory*, in 6,700 lines. The author was yesterday only a young unknown. The work is simple, written in the classic tongue of the Russian poets of the nineteenth century, and it reaches at certain moments the heights of a lyricism packed with lived experience, with lucid passion, with emotional intelligence, proper to the greatest emotional radiance.

Let him who falls on the reddened dust,
His helmet pierced with lightning,
Let him who falls pardon the two who live
Their holy right in earthly caresses.

As a whole, in spite of inevitable and probably sincere concessions to the ideological phraseology of the moment, this work appeared to be of the first order; and I see nothing to compare with it in the four European languages in which I try to follow literary production.

At the same moment as I received the official literary review containing this poem, I learnt after some years of delay, for secrecy is the rule, of the death (one should say the assassination) of one of the most significant Russian poets of the last thirty years: Ossip Emilievitch Mandelstam. He would have been a little more than fifty, had he lived. He founded, round about 1913, with Nicholas Stepanovitch Goumilev, the school of Akmeism, which exerted a wide and fertile influence. Akmeism made its object to express the "immediate truth" in perfectly complete forms. (N. S. Goumilev, one of the four or five Russian poets of the first magnitude at the outbreak of the revolution, professed openly counter-revolutionary opinions and was shot in 1921). I remember an evening, at Mandelstam's home in Leningrad during 1932. The poet had collected a number of writer

friends to read to us a work in prose which he had brought back from a journey in Armenia. I will not name here any of those present, my comrades and friends, in order not to compromise the survivors. A Jew, rather small, with a face of concentrated sadness and restless and meditative brown eyes, Mandelstam, highly appreciated in the literary world, lived poorly and with difficulty. He was published hardly at all, he produced little, not daring to struggle against the condemnation of the censors and the diatribes of the orators of the Associations of Proletarian Writers. The chiselled text which he read to us made me think of Giraudoux at his best, but here was no question of the vast dream of Suzanne before the Pacific; instead, it was secretly the question of the poet's resistance to the strangler's cord. The visions of the lake of Erivan and of the snows of Ararat raised in the murmur of a breeze a demand for liberty, a subversive praise of the imagination, an affirmation of ungovernable thought . . . Mandelstam, his reading finished, questioned us: "Do you believe that this will be publishable?" It was not forbidden to admire landscapes. But would the censors penetrate the protesting language of these landscapes? I do not know if these pages saw the light of day for, not long after that, I was shut away in the Internal (and secret) Prison of Moscow (for an offence of opinion). I learn that Mandelstam tried later to commit suicide: that he wrote during the terror an epigrammatic quatrain in which one could see an allusion to the Leader, and committed the imprudence of letting it be known to several people; that he was arrested; that since 1942 his few friends considered him as deceased in captivity, in unknown circumstances.

It is allowed to publish a great poem of love. It is mortally forbidden to ask of the state what has happened to poets and prose writers who have disappeared. Even love must hold its tongue on the threshold of the dungeons.

The history of the massacre of Soviet writers in 1936-9 has not been written. No account of it has been published. What publisher, what review, would have accepted that account? All having passed into the darkness, it could only be fragmentary. But, published or not, this drama constitutes one of the fundamental events of culture in the present age. A friend, who was one of the most remarkable writers of the revolutionary generation, said to me in Moscow: "Our consciousness as Soviet writers is very different from that of Western men of letters. Not one of us escapes the anguish of possible execution. Not one of us does not exclaim bitterly in his solitude: Ah! if I could create freely!" The anguish of this extraordinary creator has been fully justified: nobody knows what has happened to him. His fifteen powerfully valuable novels have been withdrawn from the libraries. His colleagues no longer dare to pronounce his name. Such has been the fate of several master-writers of the first order, in whom should be recognised the true founders of Soviet literature. Boris Pilniak, the author of *Ivan de Maria*, of *The Naked Year*, of *Wood of the Isles*, of *The Volga throws itself into the Caspian Sea*; Bebel, author of *Red Cavalry (Konarmia)* and *Tales of Odessa*; Voronski, a former revolutionary convict, who was the animator of Soviet literature

from 1918 onwards (*Art and Life, Beyond the Dead and Living Waters, The Eyes of the Hurricane*), certainly shot because he was of the Left Opposition; the old Ivanov-Razoumnik, philosopher and historian, one of the intellectual guides of the generation of 1917 (Ivanov-Razoumnik had just published a biography of Schedrin when he disappeared. I had news of him in prison, through a young poet, my cell companion for a night, who did not know for sure why he himself was shut away; I thought I could discern that the master and his pupils were reproached with maintaining a hidden attachment to the idealist philosophy of Mikhailovski and Pierre Lavrov); the producer Meyerhold whose audacities renewed the Russian theatre between 1902 and 1936; Riazanov, the historian of Marxism, who died in exile at the beginning of the war.

Naturally I do not know enough to compile the list of lesser known writers, of the young, of authors of revolutionary memoirs, who disappeared in hundreds. No-one knows that list, except perhaps the directors of the Secret Service of the Political Police. And the *perhaps* which I place there is opaque, for the police chiefs who made the purges have themselves disappeared. The rule is that once the man is suppressed, his works are eliminated, his name is no longer pronounced; it is erased from the past and even from history. I have just read the very beautiful memoirs of Constantin Fedin on Maxim Gorki. They refer to an epoch during which I knew Maxim Gorki fairly well; he then maintained a courageous independence, did not hesitate to criticise the "revolutionary" power and finished by receiving from Lenin a friendly invitation to go into foreign exile. It is possible for me to verify the astonishing exactitude of the notes of Constantin Fedin, the care which he has put into gathering the customary discourses of Gorki, whose gesture and voice I seem to find again. In each page, meanwhile, I discover the omission of ideas often expressed, of historical facts, of names. I admire the ability, the tenacity, the paralysed honesty of the writer who succeeds in tracing a truthful and powerfully living portrait while conforming without fault (but not without distress, I imagine) to the rule of obedience.

None of these vanished writers whom I have just named, except Riazonov, was made the object of an openly declared accusation. (And Riazonov was accused in the press of having conspired with the Socialist International to prepare war against the U.S.S.R., which was the height of delirium; he was condemned in secret, by an administrative measure. In reality, he had shown several outbursts of indignation and some gestures of generosity towards persecuted Marxists) None was the object of a condemnation motivated by anything that was made the least public. Several, like Pilniak, Babel, Meyerhold, Riazonov, were personally known in both hemispheres. They had works translated into English, French, German, Spanish, Catalan, Czech, Yiddish, Chinese. No Pen-Club, even of those who had offered them banquets, posed the least question on their cases. No literary review, to my knowledge, commented on their mysterious end. Books on Soviet literature have been published abroad, which pass them over in silence, or only mention them incidentally and evasively. A universal complicity

surrounds their sufferings.

On the attitude of the reviews, that is to say of the intellectuals who make the reviews, before these mysteries and crimes, I will allow myself to cite one example. When the old German Marxist, Otto Ruhle, biographer of Karl Marx, author of many works of recognised importance, militant of the German revolution of 1918, died in Mexico in 1943, I offered to write an essay on him for an important South American review, where there were numbers of his friends. My proposition was at first received with interest, although my heretical reputation aroused a certain inquietude. As soon as I expressed the intention of mentioning, among the struggles upheld by Otto Ruhle, his participation in the John Dewey Commission which proclaimed, after the Moscow Trials, the innocence of Trotsky, I received the categorical reply: "No. Impossible."

From a rational point of view, I have never well understood why it was impossible, unless it was that an unjustifiable fear warped the conscience of the review's editors. The same evil is to-day diffused at both ends of the map of the world. A new Parisian review, popular and sympathetic, called *Maintenant*, published in last January a study of the poet Marcel Martinet, who died under the occupation (*Les Temps Maudits*, 1918, *La Nuit*, 1920, *Une Feuille de Hêtre*, 1935). The author of these warmhearted pages passes entirely in silence the struggles which the poet upheld for twenty years for the integrity of revolutionary thought. An omission touching on impiety: Marcel Martinet, whose moral courage never flinched, would have repulsed it like a treason. I understand, however, that it is practically impossible to publish to-day in Paris a hundred clear lines on the problem which I treat here. And I understand that the friends of the poet, having to choose between total silence on his death and his work and this mutilated in-memoriam, have preferred to erect a provisional monument which will lack his true greatness.

The civilised person who sees a crime committed under his window, in full daylight, without allowing himself to intervene or even to make an audible shout, will he afterwards retain his own full self-esteem, his clarity of judgment, critical spirit, the capacity to create, if he is an artist? The writer informed of what passes in the world—and I hold that it is a duty of the writer thus to be informed—is often in the uncomfortable position of this civilised person. His conscience wounded, he can only escape the oppressive contamination of directed thought, directed all the more by terror and by psychological perversion, if he confronts the whole inhumanity of the problem with a firm decision of disapproval. Here are posed, it is true, the complex questions of faith, inseparable from the social environment and from personal interest. Yet we should demand of religious or political faith that it does not obliterate the conscience. The faith of modern man should be compatible with clear knowledge, with loyalty, with that simple mental hygiene, the sense of the dignity of oneself and others: otherwise it becomes a regression to mentalities anterior to our culture considered in its superior forms. It happens too frequently under our eyes that the writer (in more general terms, the intellectual)

gives proof of a blindness which borders sometimes on imbecility, sometimes on knavery. We thus behold the disintegration of universal values by the insincerity imposed by the double game towards oneself and others. That such insincerity can be pushed back into the unconscious and that the writer believes himself, in abandoning himself to it, perfectly sincere or devoted to a supreme *raison of state*, is a no less disquieting feature of the situation.

I would not dream of underestimating the importance of the literary work of the French resistance, to which so many of my friends have given so many deaths and so much suffering. That work obviously attests a precious vitality. And that is why I feel in reading certain of its texts a sensation of asphyxia. That poetry should arise to scourge the executioners, to exalt the heroism of the tortured, to guard the proud memory of the shot, is undoubtedly one of its most human missions in the present time. But that such poetry should often be signed by poets who elsewhere praise the hangman, praise the torturer, insult the shot, speak untruths over the tombs of another Resistance inspired by the same motives—the defence of man against tyranny—that leads us, by a terrible alchemy, to the negation of all affirmed values. Pure gold is no longer better than stirred up mud. The conscience of the writer shows itself full of black shadows. The impassioned voice of song is nothing more than that of the false witness. The poetic quality of the work of Aragon has sometimes appeared to me moving and even excellent; but how many men from whom he sought instruction, whom he has loved or pretended to love in Russia and in the Third International have suffered torture and death by shooting without his having been moved by it? Without his having posed in their cases the elementary question of innocence or guilt? Without his having questioned himself on the sinister gravity of the repressions paradoxically justified by "revolutionary humanism"? Aragon wrote at another time, in 1937 I believe, in *Commune*, some incredible pages on the accused of the Moscow Trials.

The Poet of the Communist Resistance was among others the friend of Bruno Jaszynski, the Polish communist writer whose novels were published by *Humanité*, whom I knew in Moscow timidly faithful to the "general party line", and who was to die in a concentration camp of the far east. Aragon was the friend of the Secretary General of the Association of Proletarian Writers, Leopold Averbach, the most official of the directors of Soviet literature, shot where, when, how? But certainly shot, because he was the nephew of the People's Commissar for the Interior and chief of the Political Police, Yagoda, who was himself shot.

The allegiance of the writer to the party of a great power accustomed to shoot many people, is in this precise case a sufficient explanation. But beyond this, how can one understand these verses on the "traitors", written by another poet of the same party (Paul Eluard).

Il nous ont vanté nos bourreaux
Il nous ont détaillé le mal
Ils n'ont rien dit innocemment—

yes, how can one understand them? Let us grant the psychological disintegration. Let us grant that the poem, perfect as it may be in its flow, gives a false note. The reader expects to hear the voice of a defender of freedom, of an enemy of the murderers of the innocent, and the reader is deceived. And one asks uneasily: But what is then happening in the soul of these poets? The poet is suddenly stripped of his clarity. "What is truth?" asked Pontius Pilate of the condemned. Thousands of men formed by the intellectual disciplines of scientific thought—it seems—reply in fact: "It is the commandment of the Leader of my party." This is the death of intelligence, the death of ethics.

In lesser degrees, numbers of other writers of the Resistance, less clearly classified, suffering from an intoxication of the environment, incur the same criticism. They seem to have discovered the annihilation of man by totalitarian machineries only by having suffered it for several years. Have they not seen it before, elsewhere? Do they not know that this drama is not national, that Europe, that our whole civilisation is riddled with it? It is abundantly a question, under these beautiful pens, of "engaged thought", of "participation in action", of "making up one's mind", of "responsible literature" and even of consenting to perish for the just causes of our time . . . But what exactly do these formulas mean? Does one wish to apply them only in the narrow circle of the patriotism of an already past movement? Is it intended to confer on these words an esoteric sense to the detriment of their universal sense? "Engaged thought"—is it permitted here, and there effaced humbly before directed thought? "Participation in action"—is it legitimate against one oppression and to be condemned against another? That would be only a return to the tribal mentality of past ages: "Thou shalt not kill" the man of the same tribe, but it is praiseworthy to kill the man of the neighbouring tribe. "Responsible literature", rightly extolled by Jean Paul Sartre—will it limit its own responsibility to certain determined historical cases in order to renounce it before certain others? It is necessary to say that the conscience of the writer cannot elude these questions without betraying itself. And these questions to-day interest the conscience alone, I would say, of all men for whom the old magic of words, and of living works created with words, remains a means of clarifying and ennobling life.

Kenneth Rexroth

Letter from America

DEAR GEORGE,

It is hard to know just what readers of NOW will want most to know about the U.S.A. as it emerges, post-War II, ruler of the world, minus one-sixth and some additions. It isn't a nice picture. Marx had a word for it—two words—that put it succinctly, "human self-alienation" and "fetichism of commodities". This country always was a warren of greed and stupidity, now it is a madhouse. At night the streets, not just Broadway, but the main stems of Des Moines, Iowa, and Pocatello, Idaho, look like one of those old silent Russian movies of the rotten bourgeois helling around just before the workers take over. Only in this case, it isn't just the bourgeois, it's everybody, and not least the sainted workers.

There are certain index phenomena, usually accepted, which, whatever one thinks of the prigs who accept them, do give a picture: a fantastic increase in the consumption of alcohol, completely unmanageable "juvenile delinquency", jam-packed madhouses and a soaring commitment rate, a five-fold increase in the venereal disease rate in "civilised" states like California (nobody knows what goes on in the American Balkans, Mississippi, for instance) tremendous increase in gambling, a conspicuous increase in sadistic "sex crimes", with sado-masochism short of mayhem becoming a favourite indoor sport (see the pulp magazines for the Roman apotheosis of the gladiator-detective), a mass dulling and brutalization of response that can be studied in the deterioration of all forms of commercial art and entertainment, an increase in homosexuality that must be seen to be believed. (After about 10 p.m. an appreciable proportion of the crowd in the entertainment district of any fair-sized city—say one-sixth—is made up of, not modest homos, but of screaming queens and cursing dikes, the former painted, the latter mostly in mens' clothing, except for the frow-frow "fluffs".) And everybody busy throwing money around with Klondike largess at night and trotting to psychiatrists by day. Now, don't get me wrong. I am all for juveniles being thoroughly delinquent, and joy being unrefined, and some of my best friends are queer, but—these are all signs of a prolapsed nervous system and deranged gonads, and, whatever the health of a State may be, it is usually measured by the ability of its citizens to keep out of the more conspicuous forms of mischief. The U.S.A. after dark has come to look like 4th century Rome, or late Weimar Germany. The eve of the Goth, the eve of Hitler, the eve of the bomb. America is dying of a failure of nerve and a dead conscience inside it like a stone baby.

Over it all broods the unmentionable future, which everybody, even the most ignorant, knows is coming. Economic crisis, unemployment, starvation, social conflict, war and the Bomb.

Actually, in a sense, the economic crisis is already here. It is apparent that the country is not going to be able to use its incredible, war created, over-capitalization profitably. Once this spending spree is over, and it is based on nothing but pocket money, a lot of pocket money, but loose change none the less, gears, which have ground and clashed and stalled for two years now, will freeze for good. Hence the demand for war with Russia. Don't let sentimentalists tell you it's the dirty capitalists and diplomats. The Russian war, like Hitler's anti-semitism, is a genuinely popular cause, and with, roughly the same strata. No government could last an hour which was not wholeheartedly committed to it. (I am not writing this for political infants who think the Byrnes-Bevin governments are not so committed.) It isn't called that, of course, it is called "getting tough with Russia", nor is it admitted that the U.S.A. and Russia have been at war by Chinese proxies for two years. This

makes it nice for carefully groomed political bankrupts like the Partisan Review crowd, who have emerged from several years of inexplicable political silence to support the Byrnes-Bevin axis.

The coming economic crisis still shows itself publicly in rather subtle ways, the stockpiling of unmanageable inventories, hidden overproduction, e.g., in cotton and textiles, the fall of the stock market, the floating of new issues to pay dividends on old, etc., etc., but principally in the perfectly obvious falling rate of profit—the inability of U.S.A. industry to get going again at capacity and still make money and the incorrigible disorder at the point of production. So the loose change is being sopped up with \$5 liquor, \$20 whores, baccarat for the workers, \$2 steaks, and second-hand jalopies that sell for more than new cars. (Because there are hardly any new cars.) This may all look superficial, but don't forget, the best economists, qua economist, amongst the Bolsheviks, that is, Bukharin and his friends, went on insisting that the great crisis of 1929 was only a stock market depression, well into 1931! What is important, too, is that the backlog of lower middle-class and working-class money invested in war bonds is burning up in the price inflation and spending spree. It simply isn't going to be there soon to sustain that post-war boom in consumer goods that was going to keep the economy running for years and years. (At this moment my wife just handed me a present, a yellow stoneware bowl worth about 35c., with a price tag, \$1.45, plus tax.) Further, the spread of war bond investment never compared with that of the first war. The Liberty Bonds were proportionately speaking, far more diffused in the economy and hence gingered the boom of the twenties. The bonds of War II are already, much too many of them, in the hands of the banks.

The Republican victory in the recent elections must look strange to a Labour England, across the Channel from a Stalinist France. It is a British commonplace that Americans are politically illiterate. (Why susceptibility to the oratory of 1775-1800 should be any more a sign of illiteracy than a weakness for the nonsense of 1848-70, I don't quite understand.) The issues dividing Europe into III, II, II $\frac{1}{2}$ and Papal Internationals simply do not exist in the U.S.A. Then, too, all this sucker money floating around gives the false impression that there still exists an open field for Free Enterprise, and every elector hopes that he can get his while the getting is good.

The principal factors in the Republican victory, or rather Democratic defeat, seem to be: (1) The hopeless economic muddle, without, as yet, any real suffering. (2) The shortage of commodities in the face of an inflated greediness; much of this is really due to strikes which have sometimes dragged on for months; of course, nobody tells the average citizen that U.S.A. capital has been on a political strike for two years. (3) The inability of the Administration to handle the tapering off period of the war economy; culminating in the meat fiasco, actually a strike of the ranchers, packers, and wholesalers. (4) Certain critical shortages, e.g., housing, which is not even keeping up with the increase of population and which was non-existent during the war; this again is due to a strike of building materials manufacturers, lumber interests, etc., and the refusal of the powerful building trades unions to adjust to the conditions of a mass housing programme; situations like this, which prevail in several fields, were completely beyond the control of the Administration. (5) The historical bankruptcy of New Dealism. Roosevelt took power amongst a lot of badly scared rabbits. Post-war America is a land of coyotes, not starving coyotes, but certainly coyotes with over-stimulated appetites. Those once profitably idealistic Trades Union leaders have become hardboiled economic condottieri, with amongst the largest income taxes in the U.S.A., bullet-proof cars, Tommy-gun guards, and entry into the "progressive" salons of Hollywood actresses and N.Y.C. surrealist millionairesses. They no longer need those busy little men who subscribe to the *Nation* and *New Republic* (two comic supplements of the *Manchester Guardian* published weekly in the U.S.A.) The "Soul of Man Under Veblenism" is a closed chapter in U.S.A. history. (6) The desertion of the Democratic Party by the Stalinists. This might seem good riddance, but in many industrial areas and big cities, they were the ones who really worked, ringing doorbells and getting out the vote. Also, with almost thirty years of training

in cynicism, they were able to hand out propaganda that surpassed both the effrontery and skill of the old line bar-room politicians. (7) The Wallace imbroglio. This was undoubtedly Stalinist manipulated, though it is difficult to say how much Wallace was aware of what he was doing; he is certainly under their influence. (8) The breakdown of the big city machines due to fat headedness and old age in office—Kelly in Chicago, Hague in Jersey, Prendergast in Kansas City, Tammany in N.Y.C., only the Colorado organizations held up. Chicago, for instance, had got to the point where the city, simple as a service mechanism, had begun to break down. Many city services were as bad or worse than during the economic crisis when Chicago was stagnating in total bankruptcy. (9) Truman himself. One thing should be said in the poor haberdasher's justification. The Stalinists have carefully built up the legend that he is more "reactionary" than Roosevelt, because he is less confident that he can outsmart Stalin. As a matter of fact, he is, on the record, much more "pro-labour" than Roosevelt, and much more forthright about it. He just isn't such a smoothie as the Old Master.

As for the working-class. I am inclined to agree with Holley and Dachine. It shows no signs of any militancy. Of course, behind the facade of Babylon which I began this letter by describing, ordinary people go on living ordinary, hard, seedy, sometimes squalid lives, overworked and starved for more than bread. These are the people who, when they can do nothing else, do what they have to do. And Stalin is betting, as his every move makes manifest, on the breaking of catastrophic economic crisis over the U.S.A. within a very short time. Then, I think, the U.S.A. will come to look much like France on the eve of war, with the strike of class against class a permanent feature of the economy, the Centre breaking up, and the Stalinists slowly pressing for power. (This, of course, less acutely, is what is happening now.) All this will lead to considerable commotion. That it will lead the working-class or any other large number of people towards more libertarian social practices is more than doubtful. I think the most we can hope for is to win back various *declassés*, dislocated intellectuals, self-educated workers, young artists and writers, etc. (in Emma's day, most U.S.A. highbrows and/or Bohemians called themselves anarchists), and, once effective cadres have been developed from this somewhat unpromising material, build study and discussion groups amongst the working-class, or rather amongst the general population. We are still a long way from "effective cadres". I think anarchists should realize that the day is almost certainly coming when they will have to go underground, throughout the world, for at least a generation. That means carefully picked people, caution, responsibility, and very solid construction, now. I see little of this.

Maybe I have painted a somewhat dreadful prospect. How is it reflected in intellectual spheres? Pretty awful, worse if anything. Damn few went to it, but the war finished off a generation of U.S.A. intellectuals. They all went to Hell on a gravy train of human blood. Years of the expedientism of Lenin, Stalin and/or Trotsky and/or John Dewey had accomplished a miracle of surgery. Thousands of people woke up one day to discover that their backbones had been painlessly removed under the influence of laughing, or at least sniggering and chattering, gas. They had never missed them. The W.P.A. Writers' Project changed its name to the Office of War Information; salaries were upped handsomely; one went on, going to cocktail parties for a Second Front, then for Russian Aid, then for Yugoslav Relief, then for United (!) Spanish Aid, just like one had gone to cocktail parties for the Scottsboro Boys, or had drunk the boys out of the trenches by Christmas in Spain. Everybody was better dressed and people went to bed with less urging and there were a lot of uniforms around, which made the girls look hot and the men look distinguished; otherwise there wasn't much difference. The war was never mentioned except in overtly Stalinist circles, where everybody had more fun pretending to be the American Legion Post in Emporia, Kansas, on the Fourth of July. The "ideological leader" of the highbrow dissent of the later thirties, the "Partisan Review" dropped its one irreconcilable, Dwight Macdonald, and dummied up with a good book by H. James for the duration. Amongst those who had "arrived" not a voice was raised, not a peep, not just against the war,

but even against the Japanese-American concentration camps, the jam-packed penitentiaries, C.O. hunger strikers, persecution of German-Americans (that is still not supposed to have existed—the papers were ordered to print no such news.) Hamburg, Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, never a murmur. Believe it or not, the best self-styled progressive circles are still justifying the Bomb—"Look at all the lives it saved." The nearest thing to a man of integrity amongst the successful writers of the country, was, I suppose, Jim Farrell, whose voice, unfortunately, was a little muffled, by his head being stuck in one of the many Trotskyite tar barrels.

It would be different if this had happened to a bunch of fools and happy parasites—spiritual whores have written good poems and painted good pictures in the past—but it didn't. These people are not innocent with invincible ignorance. They all knew they were selling their souls for a mess of government vouchers. Hence, the sources of artistic integrity were fouled and dried up, and the stuff they have written, during the war and since, is completely worthless. A good example is the *Partisan Review's* bright boy, Karl Shapiro, who has written two books almost as factitious as William Rose Benet. The innocents, on the other hand, sometimes did well. Richard Eberhart, who really believed in the war and went into the Navy, came out of it a lot bigger than he went in, Randall Jarrell is another who seems to have been rudely awakened.

You wanted to know about U.S.A. poetry and I see I have got around to it. I am not sure what you want—a critical estimate, or news of the war years. It might be best to take a sort of census, arranged according to the age of the authors.

Of the older people, William Carlos Williams has come to shine forth as the greatest resident American poet still in possession of his faculties. (Thus eliminating Ezra and T.S.E. from the argument). Pound by the way is publishing his wartime *Cantos* widely. Patrioteers like George Dillon, editor of *Poetry*, U.S.A. seem to look on this as a sort of perverted penance, and then, too, it gives them the chance to smirk—"Looky, looky, how democratic we are! See, this is what we fought for so bravely, Freedom of Speech!" Stevens is repeating himself, and rather dully. Marianne Moore published a small book, *Nevertheless*, with one fine poem, "In Distrust of Merits", probably the best war poem written in America. John Gould Fletcher, no longer an Imagist, is still active, writing in the old, resonant, oratorical, grass roots, tradition. Intensely American, he has found it difficult to deal with the Stalinoid editors of the slick magazines, and has returned to the little magazines. A posthumous book of Marsden Hartley's was published. A fine poet, very direct, simple, and extremely autochthonous, he was not fashionable in the thirties. Wallace Gould, another autochthone, also died, and also was unfashionable. Speaking of aborigines, Sandburg went completely to pieces and wrote some unbelievable tripe. E. E. Cummings keeps right on, incurably on the side of the angels. Robinson Jeffers keeps on, too, for those that like him. Aiken published a book, *The Soldier*, not up to his standard. Ransom brought out his selected poems. Tate, whom those who don't know him thought conventional, surprised many by speaking up in some very forceful poetry. Yvor Winters, a fine poet and cracked critic, published his selected poems, *The Giant Weapon*.

The old avant garde, transition, Paris-American, Objectivist, etc., people have, most of them, fallen silent. Abel, Rosenberg, Zukofsky, Rakosi apparently write little now-a-days. Roskolenko, a second mate during the war, has matured into a rather solemn, conscientious poet. Charles Ford and Parker Tyler, the Star Dust Twins, have both published books recently. They run a hilariously provincial surrealist magazine, *View*. Silly as it may be at times, it is fun to read. Whatever their faults, they are "agin the guvnmnt", they never forget that the artist is the enemy of society, and they are lively, if ill-informed editors, and better poets than most of their generation.

The proletarians are silent, too, or no longer write anything of interest. Funaroff is dead. I have seen nothing of Edwin Rolfe in years. Brinnin has grown and moved on to wider realms. Fearing has become a sort of big city Robert W. Service. Don Gordon is about the only one left. Muriel Rukeyser,

the best of the lot, resigned from the O.W.I. with only one silly and wicked book to live down. She is a feeling type. Her last book, *Beast in View* (the Beast being, as far as I can make out, Sex, and the View being Salubrious), is a big improvement. What is wrong with her is her friends. Horace Gregory and Marya Zauterenskaya have both published their collected poems, and, just recently, a history of American poetry. Gregory, of course, is an important poet, and his wife a very accomplished one.

There is a loose group, mostly dons, who take off from T.S.E., though they would deny it, some via Ransom, Tate, or Winters, some from the Cambridge of 7 ambiguous years, Eberhart I mentioned above; he has really grown the last few years, has a new book coming out over there—Chatto, I think. Janet Lewis (Mrs. Yvor Winters) has just had a book of small, quiet, immaculate poems, somewhat similar to Elizabeth Daryush or Ruth Pitter or Sturge Moore, but with less scope; very perfect in their way. Dudley Fitts has published nothing new that I know of, nor Blackmur, nor J. V. Cunningham, nor Howard Baker. Robert Fitzgerald had a book, *A Wreath for the Sea*, competent, but rather Audenish poems, though "purer" than most Audenites, and not as sloppy as W.H.A. himself. Robert Penn Warren has published some good verse, and some pretty slick novels, the last one a best seller. All this group started in the old *Hound and Horn*, a very toney sheet, if not in Ransom's *Fugitives*, and moved on to the *Southern Review* when that failed. With the collapse of the Huey Long machine, the University of Louisiana gave up the *Southern Review* and now they are all crowded into Ransom's *Kenyon Review*, a magazine which gives the impression of being edited by a committee of archdeacons, which, more or less, it is. There has also sprung up a new academic style—notably Theodore Spencer and Josephine Miles. Their work reminds me of small, very neat holes cut in the paper, a hole to a page.

And so we come to New York Verse, the *Partisan Review* and ilk. It is bad for my ulcer to write about these people, but I will do my best. Delmore Schwartz has published little recently. His last book *Genesis* was, and I say this with the best intentions in the world, dull. Elizabeth Bishop's work resembles that of Miss Miles and Professor Spencer, with a faint flavour of Marianne Moore. The war knocked a lot of the juvenile cockiness out of Randall Jarrell. Literary editor of the *Nation*, his greatest danger now is too rapid success. Harry Brown has been writing bad novels. I don't know what has happened to Dunstan Thompson. Eleanor Clark's recent work seems to have been mostly translations from the French and a novel. She is a good, but not very great, poet. A young man, Byron Vazakas, has come up in recent years. I may be missing something, but he reminds me of Schumann's music—it all sounds alike, sort of super juke box poetry. Another young man, David Schubert, very promising, died last year. Weldon Kees, a very bright fellow, had a hard time recovering from Audenism. He is writing well, and really belongs with the group I want to discuss last. The best poet to be identified with the *Partisan Review* was John Wheelwright, a fabulous Boston Brahmin, Trotskyite, eccentric, Anglocatholic, alcoholic, and what have you, a wonderful friend, and a really, basically, original poet. His death was a great loss, both to literature and to everybody who knew him. Charles Snider, another Trotskyite poet, not of the cocktail party variety, had a remarkable promise; he has vanished, and may have died.

There are others, Hays, Berryman, De Jong, Nims, Millspaugh, Villa, Derleth, Sylander, Whittemore, Creekmore, many others, whose verse I am not really familiar enough with to make a considered judgment.

By himself belongs Alfred Young Fisher, whose *Ghost in the Underblows* appeals to highly specialized tastes. I don't care for it much, though I can see its merits. Again to take comparison from music, he reminds me of Schoenberg very thick and a little inclined to somnambulism.

So far, all this belongs to the past, more recently to an unhappy past. There are many exceptions, but one feels that a door, or an iron curtain, has closed on most of these people. What's new? Not much, at least, yet. Don't forget, it was practically impossible for any voice of dissent to get a hearing during four years of war, and how many years is it of peace? Least of all in the

"independent radical" or avant garde press. Myself, once a poet of the *New Republic*, was welcomed only in *Retort* and *New Directions*. Miller, by making a frightful racket, was able to get himself heard. He owes his great importance to the fact that the morally famished (especially the youth who were being asked to do Archibald Macleish's dying for him) turned to him as the only voice audible. Henry Miller, denouncing an unbelievably shameless and shameful society. He and Patchen. Both have been very popular, and both have deserved it, certainly. But the adulation of their disciples has somewhat dulled the acumen of their self-critical senses, and, what is probably synonymous, their sense of humour. It is a favourite sport amongst the N.Y.C. cocktail literati to denigrate Patchen. It is true that he is careless and sentimental at times, but he has done more than anybody else in recent years to restore poetry to its vatic and prophetic role. The accents of Jeremiah and Isaiah doubtless sound vulgar to ears attuned to the niceties of unmotivated verbal trickery that win one applause in the better English seminaries.

Paul Goodman has written some interesting ethical essays, evaluating anarchist morality in terms of contemporary quandaries. He is a good poet, and does not write enough poetry. Stylistically, Robert Lowell belongs with the post-Ransom, post-Empson people. He was a student of Eberhart's. Ideologically, he seems to be close to the British Roman Catholic "libertarians". He was a C.O. and went to prison. Quite young, he will probably go far; just now he is a little too polished. Thomas Merton, another Roman Catholic, is a Trappist monk. His poetry is moving when it is not too slick. The older Roman Catholic poet, R.E.F. Larsson, is also a pacifist, but has published no book since 1939.

Probably the most important poet to come up during the war in the U.S.A. is William Everson. He belongs in the tradition of Sandburg, Marsden Hartley, Wallace Gould, the later J. G. Fletcher, the best of E. L. Masters, all poets very unfashionable in the metaphysical thirties. His one fault is a tendency to solemnity, due probably to having read Robinson Jeffers in High School, but that, I guess, is what one has to pay for growing up in California. Certainly, after reading volumes and volumes of people who sound like John Donne amongst the purple cut glass tigresses and fur lined soubrettes, I found it very refreshing to discover, one day in the midst of war, somebody who sounded like a deadly earnest, deeply responsible young California farmer, who was literate, articulate, honest, and locked up for his beliefs. It is easy to overdo the Honest Abe aspects of Everson's poetry and personality—there is more than that. But it is important in a C.O. camp. Because, in small letters, and in the most general sense, he is a conscientious objector, who is out to do something about it with the work of his own hands.

This brings us to California. George Leite, editor of *Circle*, has published a number of interesting California poets, several of whom have also been printed by *New Directions*. Jeanne McGahey, Sanders Russell, Robert Duncan, Richard Moore, Rosalie Moore (no relation), Thomas Parkinson, Robert Stock, various others. I am anything but a booster for California, but there does seem to be an unusual amount of activity going on in this area, and certainly there is a disproportionate "libertarian movement" out here. Philip Lamantia, one of this group, who started out as a surrealist and editor of *View* and is now a C.O., an anarchist, and an "erotic mystic", has just published a book, *Erotic Poems*. He probably has more kinship with young British writers than most. Everson, by the way has a new book coming up with *New Directions* next year, unless he should decide to print it himself.

Notice that almost all these people, except Lowell, are grouped around *New Directions*. James Laughlin, the publisher has probably done more for American literature than anybody who ever lived. The fashionable (in the thirties) don't like him, and they think it cute to laugh at his poetry. It is not great, but it is smooth, simple, and sometimes very moving epigram writing, and it says the same things that Miller does, or Patchen, or Kees, or Everson, or Goodman, or Lamantia, or myself or Lowell. That isn't fashionable with the thirties either, but this isn't the thirties.

What does this all mean? I am afraid I have written a bit of a Little

Journey to the Homes of the Near Great. It is probably too brief to make much sense. The sense it makes is this: we have the young. When I was a kid after the first war, it was assumed that a college professor was, by definition, a whore and a liar. It was assumed that the world was divided into those who knew that society was a monstrous, evil lie, and those, the scissorbills, who didn't . . . the hip and the squares, as they say to-day. Slowly, as the memory of a great betrayal died away, the panders of official culture began to insinuate themselves into the confidence of the young. Five years or so ago, hot young Trotskyite lady organizers had a habit of, without warning, giving up the Revolution for Ransom's *Kenyon Review* and nobody thought the worse of them for it. Rimbaud, the Enemy of Society, had become a deity amongst those who make a business of making millionairesses giggle. Marx was something that Well Known Public School Boy and his followers amongst American would-be public school boys went boo! with. Nobody had ever heard of Bourne, Kropotkin or Berkman; Emma, Isadora Duncan, were forgotten, people snickered at the name of D. H. Lawrence. To-day, that little world is deadlier than a doornail. It committed suicide, for a consideration. And the young read Lawrence, and Miller, and Berdyaev, and Kropotkin, and Berkman, and Bourne, and Schweitzer, and Bernanos, and Gill, and Patchen, and Comfort, and Savage, and you and me. At least all the young I know do.

Faithfully,

KENNETH REXROTH.

John Ellis

Film Critics and Film Reviewers

"Critics are people obliged to say striking things who do not engage a very high grade of conscience or ability."

(*George Eliot.*)

"We do not propose to invite her (Miss Arnot Robertson, the B.B.C. film critic) to our press shows in the future."

(*Messrs. M.-G.-M.*)

Any similarity between the views of George Eliot and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is, of course, purely coincidental . . . they both dislike critics who use them harshly. It is no new thing for the business gentlemen of Wardour Street, or Tower Street, to become angry at critics who indulge in the well-known sport of knocking their pictures. "After all," as one of their apologists has put it, "it is a little galling for a man whose company has risked a fortune on a film to hear it dismissed as tripe in two or three sentences, studded by pearls of wit, as those sentences may or may not be." Let us be content to record here that the business gentlemen are in the very best company. As Wordsworth said: "The writers of reviews while they prosecute their inglorious employment, cannot be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences . . ." In spite of the general tendency to disparage critics, a healthy independent criticism is vital for the cinema. Of the two main groups of critics in this country one cannot really be called independent; and neither really-deserves the name of critic.

The first group is composed of the trade press reviewers, whose reviews are intended as guides for exhibitors in booking films from the renters. They

are sometimes given to exaggeration, but they tell no actual untruths. "Caesar and Cleopatra glorious. Brilliant acting in superb Technicolor production", as one paper headed a long review of the celebrated Pascal epic. And Caesar surely is glorious. . . if the use of Technicolor does not confer a right to that title what does? Moreover, the acting is brilliant, and there does not seem to be much doubt that the picture was intended as a prestige picture. "This film must command the admiration and attention of audiences everywhere" as the same review goes on to say. Since the Rank group, one of whose production companies made the film, contains within its organisation the renters who distribute the film and two of the big circuits of halls in one of which the film was widely exhibited, certainly the picture is likely to receive every opportunity of commanding the respect and admiration of audiences. The trade reviews do not lie, nor are they directly a part of the renter's exploitation. It is true that they carry heavy advertising from the renters, at times of films reviewed in the same issue. But their peculiar brand of cliché is well understood by the exhibitor, and it is widely supposed that the discerning can read between the lines where necessary and draw their own conclusions. Certainly gems like "tolerable for unsophisticated patronage", and "moderate for the masses" tell their own story. Deliciously equivocal, however, and possibly misleading to the shrewdest exhibitor is "appealing entertainment of its type". For those who have little time to read, the *Cinema* runs a one word guide under the headings: Story, Direction, Acting, etc. A typical dip in the bran tub produces this:—"Story: vague. Direction: rambling. Acting: Indifferent. Or:—"Dynamic, vivid, impeccable." It would be foolish to regard these reviews as an easy way to a cheap laugh. They are the work of men who have generally speaking been in the film business for a long time, who know their market, and who know the exact purpose of their job. Occasionally, usually it must be admitted where films not heavily advertised are concerned, trade press reviews are by any standards as good as those appearing anywhere else. One of the best reviews of "Ivan the Terrible" for instance, appeared in the weekly *Cinema*. It was concise, straightforward, sensible and just, four bull points in a critics' market notable for its uncertainty and fluctuations.

We should not leave the trade press without mentioning the documentary trade press. Where the former is commercial the latter is unashamedly the reverse; where the former's style is exuberant the latter is sober, solid and, it must be admitted, occasionally a little dull. But then, so, often, are the films which are reviewed. In the majority of cases these are sponsored in advance of production by Government Departments, or by one of the big business concerns seeking an outlet for what would otherwise be consumed in E.P.T. Their makers are therefore relieved of the sordid necessity overhanging commercial film makers, the necessity to please the public or go bankrupt. The writers in the documentary press have a genuine regard for the film as an art independent of the entertainment industry; most of them are engaged in the practical business of film making . . . and a number of government departments interested in the same film can be as trying a proposition as the fickle public of the box office.

The second of the two groups is formed by the "lay critics" of the daily and periodical press. These critics operate at all levels of taste from the *New Statesman* to the most popular Sunday paper. Their duty, as one of the more popular among them recently put it, is "to tell readers (whose tastes being different cannot be assessed on any level) whether they regard a picture as a good, bad or indifferent specimen of its kind." They are guides to the week's films, and following them is like picking a jockey at the beginning of the racing season and backing his mounts whenever they run. Punters who do not choose Gordon Richards are apt to come unstuck, and where is the critic as reliable as Gordon? But after some experiment we know that what pleases Mr. W. is worth our 3/6 or even 5/-, while what gets four stars from Miss X. is not worth our money at any price. The 'lay' critics have to review three or four films at a time in a limited space. They cannot say very much, even if they want to, in the thousand or two words allowed them. The most they can do, and this the best of them do consistently and well, is to maintain

a decent standard by which to measure the spate of films released. This is not easy: films are seen cold, at unpleasantly early hours of the morning in many cases, often in half-empty cinemas, and if after a week of vulgar, dreary, stereotyped, childish and unbelievably boring films the critic happens across one that contains even a vestige of adult intelligence he or she is apt to value it a bit high. In spite of all that Wardour Street says the simple fact is that the lay critics are too kind. Time after time they lean over backwards to praise a film which tries, however ineptly, to treat a theme in a reasonably adult way. This is particularly true of their attitude to British films, which as everyone knows are incomparably better now than before the war. But they are not perfect, and even the best of them are not without faults. It would be doing a great disservice to the British films if the critics and the makers became a mutual admiration society. No, let's have a few hard knocks from the critics where the film deserves them. Cinema audiences are more inclined even than playgoers to accept the fare they are offered uncritically. They need constant prodding to stop their treating the movie houses as a drug. The critics must go on prodding.

The terms 'critic' and 'reviewer' have been used indiscriminately above. This is because neither the critics of the trade press, who have special functions to perform, nor the lay critics with their pressure of space, can really be considered as more than reviewers of films. Criticism, said Matthew Arnold, requires that the critic 'keep himself free from practical entanglements', so that he may indulge 'in that more free speculative treatment of things'. Few of us now believe that it is possible for a critic to inhabit the lofty and detached peaks where Matthew Arnold would place him; Arnold himself was bound up in his social environment, and it is even less possible now than in the nineteenth century to become the olympian observer. But the aim of the good critic is still surely the same, even though succeeding ages will not agree that it was achieved. And more even than book reviewers are film reviewers caught up in the day to day activity of reviewing. Book reviewers can at least read their books slowly, and a second or third time; they can refer to previous works by the same author, or to works by contemporaries, by stretching out their hands to the bookshelves. A film reviewer sees the film when it is projected, at a fixed speed, or not at all. Old films cannot be seen again at a moment's notice . . . indeed, it is often impossible to get a decent print, even if facilities for projection are available. And then the review must be written, in a short time and in a fixed number of words. The practical entanglements are too compelling. The film reviewers need time and space to become critics. This they can only get in the long occasional article on some aspect of the cinema, in which they can discuss tendencies, can attempt to formulate some principles, can develop an argument. Dwight Macdonald's articles in the *Partisan Review* are admirable examples of what is meant. In them he discussed at various times the work of Eisenstein, and the decline of the Soviet Cinema. We may not agree with his thesis; it certainly appears conditioned by the prevailing anti-Soviet tone of many American intellectuals (especially the ex-fellow travellers), but it is a true critical approach. He discusses a certain aspect of the cinema as a whole and within the larger framework of artistic, social and political development. Indeed, he attaches perhaps too much weight to political considerations and not enough to technical. The work of Eisenstein may have suffered at the hands of the bureaucrats, just as it suffered at the hands of his American sponsors after his ill fated trip to Mexico, but it certainly was greatly affected by the change over from silent to sound films in the Soviet Union.

If and when the film reviewer is given the time and the space and the opportunity to become a film critic he will need, in addition to the usual equipment of the good critic, a good knowledge of the technical side of film making, distributing and exhibiting. This does not mean that in future he will judge all films on their technical merit alone. On the contrary. "Excellence of technical achievement does not transmute a fundamentally worthless theme into a work of art, nor ever will do." The critic who judges by technical standards and neglects the general standards by which works of art are judged,

is making a worse mistake than the James Agates of the critics' circle, who boast that they know nothing and care less about the technics of the film. The film "The Lost Week-end" was judged on all sides to be outstanding. It was a technician's film, and especially a director's film. A director who can make Ray Milland appear such a good actor that he won an award at the Cannes festival for his performance is a miracle maker, quite apart from anything else. But these facts do not make the film a work of art comparable with say, "Strange Incident", a much less glossy affair. The same considerations apply to "Brief Encounter", also a masterly film technically. But no amount of excellence there can lift the whole conception and treatment of the theme above the level where the script placed it. A knowledge of film technique does not relieve the critic from applying standards other than technical; but it is very necessary for him to know about technical matters if he is to become what the cinema so badly needs, a genuine critic.

It has often been said that the radio and the film are the first two of the mass arts which will distinguish the coming collectivist epoch. Yet the full implications of this statement are not always understood. A 'mass art' means clearly an art with a mass audience. Millions listen to the radio and flock to the films where thousands only go to concerts or art galleries. But on the production side too the film is a mass art. One man can write a novel; all that is required, besides time and talent, is a pen and paper. The final form of the novel is in the manuscript, and nothing in the subsequent printing alters this. The painter needs canvas, brushes and pigments, and the picture is fixed in its final form when he has put brush to canvas for the last time. In each case the final result is the work of one mind and one hand. The final form of a film is the ten thousand feet of cellulose nitrate base covered with light sensitive emulsion on which are registered the 160,000 separate images of the action and the variations in density or area of the sound track. Provided projection conditions are reasonable this is the material which will be seen on the screen. But it is very far from being the work of one mind and one hand. The list of credits which precedes most films shows how many different people have had a hand in the final result. Producer, director, cameraman, film editor, sound engineer, art director, music composer, these are the chiefs only of a great number of skilled craftsmen of all kinds from plasterers to laboratory technicians whose work has contributed to this final form. At its best this complex team will work smoothly towards translating to the screen the ideas of the one or more men controlling the production, ideas which will themselves often have been considerably modified by the weeks of preliminary discussions with the leading technicians. It is fashionable at present to attribute to the director the major part in this work. Many have criticised this tendency, among them Frank Launder who recently wrote: "The practice of according the film director a place of predominant importance in the cinema, amounting at times to investing him with almost mystical powers, is a curious fallacy which unhappily threatens to die very hard." It is part of the critic's duty to separate the work of the various artist technicians when analysing the film. Usually this is confined to perfunctory references to direction, or 'brilliant cutting' and left there . . . with perhaps, in the more highbrow reviews, references to rhythm, or 'cutting tempo'. Yet the task of deciding exactly which person is responsible for certain effects is immensely difficult, and film technicians themselves are not always agreed. It is true that the best films nearly always bear the mark of a single mind, but it would surely be a rash critic who would guarantee to spot the work of a certain director in every case, as an art critic may be supposed to name accurately the painter of any given picture. I have said 'director' in this case, in spite of the quotation above. The reason is that the director is often the writer of the screen play, or at any rate is deeply implicated in the writing of the final script. René Clair is reported to have said that in Hollywood he was given twenty scripts and asked to choose the one he liked the best. As he said "I do not like that." The films which have most unity of purpose, which approach nearest to being artistic wholes, are those where the creative ideas are the work of one, two, or three men who agree on the final script and one or more of

whom produce and direct. Carol Reed, Eric Ambler and Peter Ustinov in the "Way Ahead", or any of the well-known 'pairs' (the Boultings, the Archers, Launder and Gilliat) working in British Films at present, are examples.

The influence of technical development on the art of the film needs whole books to itself. The possibilities of the silent film were still being explored when the coming of sound altered the whole method of production. The sudden introduction of new and complicated techniques meant that emphasis was transferred from developing the film as a medium for conveying ideas in the most imaginative and effective way to coping with the sheer practical difficulties of sound film production. For a time sequences made with silent technique alternated with sequences of stagey dialogue and no action. In the fine Warner films of 1930-33 this is particularly noticeable. Actors who had developed a technique of facial movement and mime suitable for the silent film are found uneasily modifying their tried and approved methods before the microphone. The Russians partly attempted, in theory at any rate, to maintain their basic principles of silent film making, adding sound as counter point to the picture. Both "Alexander Nevsky" and "Ivan the Terrible" are based on this theory. The long succession of beautiful stills, the arrangement of which in carefully planned and integrated sequences ('montage') which distinguished the great films of the golden age of Soviet Cinema, reappear twenty years after with the addition of Prokofiev and some dialogue. The other main line of development conditioned by the coming of sound tends to make every film a photographed stage play. But the stage play is now photographed in purely cinematic terms. Every device of camera angle, moving camera, Long Shot, Mid Shot, Close Up, and all the rest are employed to give point and emphasis to the play which is a screen play. Owing to the practical difficulties of recording sound in the open air as much as possible is shot in the studio. All the tricks and devices are employed . . . back projection, perspective sets, models, the studio tank, and innumerable others . . . to 'cheat', and to avoid the need to go on the expensive and difficult location where so many things cannot be brought under control as they can in the studio . . . weather, unwanted noise, unwanted attention of onlookers, the varying light. There is still a conflict between the "all in the studio" school and those who still hanker after the spacious days . . . between the "Men of Two Worlds" and the "Overlanders". And before the crisis is settled, and while the possibilities of sound are still only partly understood, new and more devastating inventions will be perfected: better colour, stereoscopic films, stereophonic sound reproduction, big screen television, even before long surely the artificial stimulation by electrical impulses of the senses . . . our old brave new world friend the 'feelies'. Let the critics look forward to their future delightful tasks.

Book Reviews

by Roy Fuller, George Woodcock
and Derek Stanford

THE POET IN THE THEATRE. By RONALD PEACOCK. Routledge, 10/6.

The title Mr. Peacock has given these interlinked essays on some European dramatists has an extended meaning which is only apparent when one has read them. He is not writing of poetic drama *simpliciter*, but of all drama of the last hundred years, whether in poetry or prose, which is opposed, first to the artistic ubiquity of the novel, secondly to the realistic theatre which resulted from Ibsen's middle period, and thirdly to common or garden commercialism. So mere a statement of his theme is sufficient to indicate, I think, the reward in tracing such a critical line. It not only enables Mr. Peacock to take in

Shaw as well as Yeats, Henry James as well as Eliot, but to shift an emphasis which has for too long (one realises with a slight shock) been on the drama *a thèse*. That type, as he well remarks, "had been known before, but it had never held sway over the very conception of drama, never been glorified into the pattern of dramatic perfection."

In searching for the other tradition, the tradition which must go back to the English Elizabethan drama, the French drama of the seventeenth century, and to Goethe and Schiller, Mr. Peacock, it must be admitted, is led into some pretty narrow by-ways. Of the stature of Grillparzer and Hebbel I am not competent to speak, but it is, I feel, putting too heavy a burden, for example, on the plays of Henry James (fascinating as they are), on Synge, on *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*, to ask them to support part of a high dramatic line. In fact, they will never do—as Mr. Peacock is far from unaware. Though the praise in his essay on Eliot is pitched somewhat too high, in another part of the book he helps to redress the balance by explaining how their Christian basis prevents the two plays from being truly tragic. And he is, of course, thoroughly aware of the slenderness of James' contribution to the theatre; though one cannot make it more substantial by pointing out how essentially dramatic are the James novels after his theatrical *débâcle*. Of Synge, too, his appreciation is guarded. Finally, in an excellent essay called *Tragedy, Comedy and Civilisation*, he largely restores the proper perspective by showing that the absence of a true modern tragedy is due to the absence of moral standards. "We may have thought that our age was progressing rapidly; the dearth of tragic poetry we can now see retrospectively as a symptom of an interruption of progress, a failure of civilized consciousness." What Mr. Peacock has succeeded in showing, in fact,—and it was well worth doing—is a failed tradition, but one to which some of the most interesting writers of the last few generations have most interestingly contributed—and one of real importance, as Cocteau and Sartre have recently shown us, in the literary developments of the immediate future.

As a critic he has no obtrusive moral, social or psychological apparatus—though he is clearly aware of all three modes of treatment. To the writers he deals with he brings commonsense, learning and appreciation. The result, as one might expect, is a book of unusual quality, not always even (the standard of the essays on some of the German writers and those on Synge, and Chehov is below his best), but which drives one back to its subject matter with renewed interest and widened horizons, as a critical book should. The quality which Arnold characterised as the 'free play of the mind' on its subjects, Mr. Peacock certainly possesses. For example, of Shaw's plays he says: "We have all felt again and again an extraordinary deflation as soon as the curtain has fallen." And of Shaw's comedy: "He inverts the usual method. Instead of isolating the unreasonable character, he isolates the reasonable one." Of James' novels after 1895: there is "no chronicling of a life, no 'telling the story' of actions, sufferings or love; there is the presentation of a dramatic crisis".

Of that other touchstone of a good critic, the accurate marshalling and the wide but true generalization, Mr. Peacock also shows convincing evidence—"The logic of appearances; the close analytical plan with its explanation of relationships; the exposition of character and motive within a coherent moral order; the observance of time and space as they are accepted by common sense—all this is the foundation of Sophocles and Shakespeare, of Calderon and Corneille, of Molière and Congreve", for example, and "Drama with the middle-class as its setting only recovers some creative power when that class is beginning to disintegrate and calls for criticism rather than glorification".

But this is giving away piecemeal a book which demands reading as a whole. Mr. Peacock is that English rarity, a don (he is Professor in German language and literature at Manchester University) for whom literature is not dead, and one looks forward very much to his future work.

ROY FULLER.

The poems of Louis Adeane, which have appeared in a number of periodicals for the last three years, attracted attention among discriminating critics, both for their imaginative depth and for their technical ability. It was clear that the first volume of such a poet would be a literary event to be anticipated at least with interest. Now that first volume has appeared, and, like many of Adeane's individual poems, it arouses a great deal more than interest. It is a small volume of 32 poems, a fraction of the author's output, but the selection has been careful and fruitful; the book gains much from its selectivity, for it contains no poem that does not represent, in its individual way, the peculiarly competent poetic ability of this young writer.

Louis Adeane's volume is, indeed, something of a light in the dimness of contemporary English poetry. For it is useless to disguise from ourselves the fact that we live in a period of depressing poetic sterility. The writers who made their appearance during the 1930's have, with the brilliant exceptions of Dylan Thomas, George Barker and Lawrence Durrell, either declined into the production of versified inanities or, like Savage and Symons, wisely accepted what they hope is a temporary silence and turned aside to the writing of prose. The poetic wilderness that remains is inhabited, for the most part, by strange shades of the 1920's, whose present vogue is one of the more disquieting symptoms of our literary era, and by a number of schools of sham-romantics and sham-proletarians, none of whom has either originality, imagination, or even the minimum technical ability needed to write a readable poem. Compared even with present-day France and America, neither of which can be regarded as examples of rich poetic productivity, England is almost empty of good poetry, or even capable verse.

For this reason, the appearance of a young writer like Louis Adeane, who combines a genuine poetic feeling and imagination with a really outstanding technical flair for producing musical and well-constructed verse, is an event which we cannot regard without attention. Adeane's individuality, his refusal to join in the minor schools of literary fashion, mark him out almost as much as his talent. He stands apart from his literary period, and yet he is wholly rooted in the best contemporary poetic traditions. His style represents a genuine development of the kind of capable poetry of the 1930's which was produced by the New Verse and Twentieth Century Verse groups, and the tendency to assimilate the good elements of the neo-romantic attitude has not robbed his verse of clarity, precision or musical form. While learning from the mistakes of his predecessors and refusing to allow his thought to become involved in the sterility of political sectarianism, he has nevertheless accepted the inspiration of a genuinely libertarian vision, and some of his best poems, such as *Execution Morning* and *Litany for Nine A.M.* spring from his own experience of social injustice. But it is a wider and at the same time more deeply personal vision of human tragedy that moves most of his best work, such poems as *For the Lonely* and *The Exiles*.

This is where children stand, the hand
Frantic at death beats on this salty bed.
The hungry and the faithless understand:
Remembering a legend told at home
They crowd the listening fog with eager dread,
But all is still. The boatman does not come.

This book should bring Louis Adeane recognition as a genuine and imaginative poet. It is an achievement to write verse like this at a time when most of the good are silent and most of the vocal are bad, but Adeane's poems are also important enough to deserve appreciation on their own considerable merits, quite apart from any comparison with other contemporary verse.

GEORGE WOODCOCK.

OUTLAW OF THE LOWEST PLANET, by KENNETH PATCHEN. Grey Walls Press, 8/6 net.

Literature is looking for a counter-explosive; something to use against the World-swindlers backed by their resources of nitro-glycerine. Perhaps the verse of Kenneth Patchen is poetry's answer to the atom-bomb.

This effort on the part of art to catch up with or get ahead of scientific and material progress is a constant phenomenon of history. Without the label of words, the pendant of expression attached to the objects of his environment, the poet feels existence to be without meaning, and other men vaguely feel this too. Thus, when the things confronting him are new, the poet must reply with fresh expressions. Sometimes the forms which he invents are sympathetic to the outside world, sometimes they are antipathetic. For examples, the Italian futurists, fascinated by the technique of wireless, machine-guns, aeroplanes and morse, tried to employ them in their verse. Marinetti was poetry's postscript to Marconi. On the other hand, Lord Tennyson, repelled by a decor of factory-chimneys wrote his escapist "Palace of Art". Poetry sometimes replies to 'progress' by a contemptuous turning of the back.

The method which Patchen uses incorporates these two responses. He is the madly indignant poet of a megalomaniac world of power and profit; a world where the Molochs of State and Capital seem to combine in their divers attempts to crush and extinguish the individual spirit, and to re-introduce the serfdom of man.

Sometimes his eye is on the picture before him, giving us impressions of the modern scene—"this thousand-watt dung-heap"—in a frantic delirium of disgust. If Walt Whitman was the optimist-prophet of a dollar-democracy on the rise, Patchen, then, is the Elijah of a millionaires' plutocracy in its decline. Upon this culture of banks, jazz-bands and brothels he calls down the black doves of the wrath to come:

"Because you are sick with the dirt of your money

Because you are pigs rooting in the swill of your war."

"O fiery river," he cries, "spread over this American land." Humanity, he fells, has defiled the gift of loving:

"Men have destroyed the roads of wonder,

And their cities squat like black toads

In the orchards of life.

Nothing is clean, or real . . ."

Sometimes the strain of this burden of seeing appears to be too much for him. His mind and his style run amok with the gibbering repetitions of a shell-shock case. At such moments, writes Alex Comfort in his "Preface", "his poems are little more than the ejaculations of somebody who is watching a crucifixion."

At other times, in retreat from the visible world, like the poet of the Old Testament turning his eyes "towards the hills", he turns in compensation to a vision of glory, to an imaginary universe of "the absolutely other" (as Kierkegaard describes the realm of deity and truth). Here, we meet with the strange names of villages, tribes and characters—"Lenada", "Rallas", "Volba", "Rakala"—suggesting the weird appellations to be found in Blake's "Prophetic Books". Here,

"As you stand on the third level the sky fills

With gigantic white deer, and their eyes

Glow like the thunderflowers of summer.

On their antlers baby angels sleep. Knowledge

Is not their horizon." . . .

—the heaven of a mystic surrealist.

This is the first book of Kenneth Patchen to be published in this country; a poet both satirist and seer, constructive and destructive to an equal degree, a Henry Miller of the world of verse (and himself the author of several books of prose), finally—as David Gascoyne puts it—contemporary America's "lone one-man DADA".

DEREK STANFORD.